

## Come, Let Us Go to Jesus

By Caleb d'Evegne

“Don’t you think as a missionary you should be able to answer any of these questions?”

My freshman roommate referred to some questions he found regarding religion and a general belief in God.

“Well, I don’t think I would need to because, I mean, if you would just think about what they’re saying ....”

“But don’t you think these questions are important to know the answer to?” His question cut me off sharply as his voice affirmed his frustration.

“Yeah, but if you just look at the arguments logically ....”

“But you’re not answering my question.”

We fought for a few hours deep into the winter night of our Heritage Halls apartment until our faces turned purple with discontent. I swore I was doing him a service. For years after our debate, I genuinely believed I was convincing enough to not only drag him to church with me but to push him into developing a renewed belief in God. I came to find out that not only were these “discussions” unhelpful, but they also pushed a wedge further between us spiritually that led him to stop attending church.

In revelation given to Joseph Smith in the Kirtland temple, Jesus said, “I am the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (D&C 93:2). The light of Christ is given to everyone to direct them towards truth and fill them with love from their Heavenly Parents. To further shine Jesus’s light, He came down to earth in mortal form to give us an

example of perfection we could follow. However, in His perfection, Jesus lived amongst imperfection and died because of judgments and misunderstanding. Yet, through His grace, He still helps us to “be filled with compassion” towards all, “having [our] joy [be] full” in Him (3 Nephi 17).

Having Jesus at the center of our relationship to God, His children, and ourselves is what can actively transform us not as “lords over God’s heritage, but [stewards] to the flock” (1 Peter 5:3). Following the cyclical pattern of the Christ-centered leadership model made by the Sorenson Center, Jesus establishes this model by showing us how to move from loving God’s children, to respecting agency, and ultimately to honoring accountability. When we shift our focus from beckoning others to come to Jesus and instead help ourselves and fellow children of God—one by one—to go together, we practice true leadership.

As the prime example of a leader, Jesus loves us to us; He loves us in our need and tailors His guidance to what would most help us individually come unto Him and God. When meeting with the Nephites in the Americas, Jesus speaks to them for so long that they “cannot understand all [the] words” He spoke to them and states He must return to God and visit other people (3 Nephi 17: 2-4). Yet, when He looks at them, He notes that “they were in tears...as if they would ask him to tarry a little longer with them” (3 Nephi 17:5). In this moment, instead of standing on a high mountain, chastening them for not having more faith to listen to Him (the Savior Himself), He comes to their level and heals all those “afflicted in any manner” (3 Nephi 17:7). He loves them so much He can merely see their eyes and know what they “would” ask Him if they could but speak. Our role, as imperfect humans, is to merely strive to express this level of love. In our various positions of leadership, it would be easy to chastise those who do not understand us or what we are doing. Punishing those that do not meet our expectations and

standard of love may not guide others where they need to go. As Jesus showed us, changing our strategy of understanding and expression of love to what is most needed at the time is what elevates and unifies us all.

As part of Christ's expression of love, He plays a crucial role in helping us become unified, one by one. When speaking about the impact of leadership, Elder Kim Clark said, "[Leadership] seeks to mobilize people to take action to make things better, to create a flourishing, vibrant organization that meets deep, human needs. It seeks to lift and strengthen people and help them thrive" (Walton 2020). Leadership, in this sense, requires the commitment to three things: to oneself, to some other person or persons, and to God. It requires a balance of respect. Similarly, those we lead must also respect a certain level of flexibility in their leaders and seek to commit to the same principles as a leader. In the example of an orchestra, there are several different types of leaders. The primary leader is the conductor, the central figure leading the music. The next crucial leader is the concert master, the first-chair violinist who leads the whole orchestra by playing their instrument with everyone else. Other leaders are found within the different sections of instruments. If any player ceases to play or work with those around them, the euphony easily slides into cacophony. Luckily, God is our conductor, and Jesus is our concert master. We must follow the structure given by God and the example given by Christ. Focusing on our personal relationship with both leaders will help us play better as a whole. Once we have sufficiently developed a strong connection to them, our role as leaders is to guide those under our stewardship to help us all make beautiful music together.

What can make us unified, as a group and as leaders, is honoring agency. In Luke 24, we learn about two men who walk to the city of Emmaus. On their way, Jesus joins them and talks with them while their eyes were altered "that they should not know him" (Luke 24:16). Jesus

allows Himself to be hidden from them so they can develop and progress in their own faith. After Jesus leaves, one of the men, in recognition of who they were with, says, “Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way” (Luke 24:32). Honoring agency is crucial to our own and others development. At any point, Jesus could have revealed who He was. However, He still managed to have a lasting effect on them. When it comes to our stewardship, formally or informally, our goal should be to lead with love and not with force. As Elder Palmar expressed in General Conference, “Love should never be withdrawn when a child, friend, or family member fails to live up to our expectations.” (Palmer 2017).

After returning home from a mission, I discovered that one of my closest friends from high school had decided to leave the church. Some people recommended that we should have an intervention, send conference talks, or convince him that he was wrong for leaving. Having already debated and spiritually strangled my freshman roommate, I realized that to understand my friend and their position would require a much different approach. I called him and asked him about how he had been since I had last seen him two years prior. We didn’t talk about religion. We didn’t argue. We just talked to one another; we communed with one another. I sought to see him as I had always known him: a child of God. As Rabbi Johnathan Sacks put it when asked if he was going to try to convert an opponent to his congregation, he answered, “No, I’m going to do something much better than that. I’m going to listen to him” (Medichini 2020).

Love, however, does not mean accepting what anyone may do as justifiable simply because we should love them; there is still a need to invite accountability. It wouldn’t be acceptable for a member of the orchestra to stand up and begin to play heavy rock music during a baroque piece. There are certain bounds for following in the Savior’s way. Professor Blunt from the C.S. Lewis Institute remarked, “Jesus’ whole ‘strategy’ was to be a servant leader who grew a

few servant leaders around him and then entrusted the succession of the responsibility of the mission to them—and to the power of the coming Holy Spirit within them” (Blunt 2003). Any leader cannot control or be around each of their constituents all the time to guide them as needed. For this reason, we all have opportunities to be leaders in various organizations. In our turn as a leader, which we will all be in various organizations, we will have the chance to direct those around us and to delegate certain responsibilities so we can progress while all learning together.

Whether we are talking to a friend, family member, spouse, coworker, or any other child of God, if we fail to recognize their divine worth (as I did with my roommate), we won't help anyone become better. By following the Christ-centered leadership model, we can make a difference to each person, one by one. One by one we can lift each other in a way that will help us have a brighter future in a world of turmoil. Whether we are leaders in a religious setting or not, like Christ, we should learn to harmonize with those around us in the Spirit. As Christ-like leaders, instead of asking those around us to “come to Jesus,” we can invite ourselves together to “let us go together to Jesus”.

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