



Beyond Civility

Civility can restrain conflict, but Christlike communication heals, includes, and puts people first.

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DIALOGUE

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Much has been written about how fractured our public discourse has become, and calls for civility are growing louder.

But civility alone isn't enough.

Christlike communication isn't just about being polite; it's about being present, peace-seeking, and passionate in love. The Savior's example invites something deeper than niceness: it asks for genuine connection.

We can strengthen our relationships with one another through small, intentional changes in how we communicate, especially as we strive to do so in more Christlike ways. The Savior always rooted His communication in love. Several principles stand out in the way He communicated: His emphasis on people and being present with them, His method of peacemaking, and His passionate approach to ministry.

The Savior Put People First

Christ centered His entire ministry on people. He loved and lifted those around Him. He **taught** us to “strengthen your brethren [and sisters] in all your conversation, in all your prayers, in all your exhortations, and in all your doings.”

People who exercised faith in the Savior left His presence feeling uplifted, hopeful, and loved. Because He was secure in who He was and in His divine mission, He was focused on building others up instead of tearing them down. He reached out to those on the margins—lepers, the sick, sinners, the poor, and those considered outsiders. He crossed social and cultural boundaries to love and include others. He didn’t just teach that everyone mattered; He showed it by who He chose to spend time with, eat with, and defend.

The Savior met people where they were. He wept with those who mourned. He felt compassion for the multitudes. He rejoiced in repentance, teaching parables like the prodigal son, where the son was met with joy rather than shame when he returned home.

Jesus never ignored sin or injustice, but He often addressed them in ways that lifted people up. Even when rebukes were used, love came first, and His love changed hearts.

President Thomas S. Monson, former president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, **taught** us to emulate the Savior when he said, “Never let a problem to be solved become more important than a person to be loved.”

The Savior showed that when love is primary, healing can occur—but when problems take precedence, people can be overlooked. That is the pattern He sets for us: loving and including others is not something we do after problems are resolved—it is the beginning.

The Savior Was Present

One important way the Savior showed His love for people was by being fully present.

In [3 Nephi](#), the resurrected Christ invited the people to come forward one by one to feel the wound marks in His hands and feet. The record tells us there were about 2,500 people present—men, women, and children. And yet, there was no rushing. Each person had a personal, individual moment with the Savior.

That detail has always felt quietly powerful to me. He was fully present.

Brother Randall L. Ridd, former second counselor in the Young Men General Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ, [taught](#) the adage, “Be where you are when you are there. ... When you are with friends, give them the gift of your attention.”

Years ago, I worked with a wonderful woman named Kate. We started walking together on our lunch breaks and became close friends. She was intelligent, fun, and had a fresh take on life. I always gleaned a lot from our conversations.

Kate was a member of another faith. You can imagine my excitement when she came to work one day and said, “Jenny! Two tall, painfully skinny Mormon missionaries came to my door this weekend.”

I exclaimed, “Well, did you let them in? Did you talk to them?”

“Well, no,” she said matter-of-factly. “If I’m gonna do the Mormon thing, I’m gonna go through you so you get the commission!”

I’ve thought about this friendship and what made it so successful many times throughout my life. I’ve concluded that it was because we were wholly present with each other. Smartphones weren’t a thing yet. We were not distracted in our communication.

Another friend of mine practices this in a remarkable way. Every time I’m with her, I feel confident, loved, and valued. I feel like I can be myself when I’m around her. It finally dawned on me that it’s because I’m never competing with

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people where

her phone. When she's with me, she's all there. I don't think I've ever met anyone more present. And this is someone who's just as busy—if not busier—than anyone else. In the two years I've known her, I can count on one hand the number of times I've seen her phone, and both times were when she took it out to take a picture before promptly putting it away.

I finally asked her why and how she keeps her phone away because, sadly, it's become acceptable to always be checking our phones and responding to texts. I am fully guilty of this. She smiled and said, "Oh, when I get home, I'll be back on my phone working. But right now, I'm with you."

When we are with people, we can show Christlike love by giving them our attention.

With three teenagers, I hear a lot of conversations among teens, including these sentiments:

- "It's not fun to be around so-and-so because they're always on their phone."
- "I want to invite them, but I'm worried they don't really want to hang out with me, because they're always on their phone when I'm with them."

Our actions send messages of love or disinterest, whether we intend them to or not.

President Bonnie H. Cordon, former Young Women General President of The Church of Jesus Christ, **warned**, "One of Satan's most powerful weapons is to distract us with good and better causes which, in times of need, may blind and bind us away from the best cause—the very work that called us into this world."

The best cause is twofold: coming closer to Christ and lovingly helping others grow closer to Him. And sometimes—oftentimes—that means putting our phones away.

Being present may look like silencing our phones and putting them out of sight during lessons, meetings, conversations, and meals, unless we're using our phones for the lesson to access our scriptures. It might mean not taking our phones to the dinner table. Essentially, it is choosing people over screens. These small choices signal love, respect,

and consideration for others. They also show self-awareness and empathy, recognizing that others might feel frustrated when we're distracted while they're trying to talk to us.

People over phones. Most of the time, the phone can wait. If it's an emergency, we can politely excuse ourselves. Sometimes we have a five- or 10-minute window with a person—or less. How do we want to leave them feeling?

Even our Heavenly Father, who hears countless prayers a day—millions if not billions—is 100 percent attentive when we speak to Him. We are never competing for His attention.

We will greatly bless our relationships if we offer one another even a portion of that same care.

The Savior Was a Peacemaker

Another defining aspect of Christlike communication is peacemaking.

Peacemakers distinguish themselves by their ability to truly listen, especially when opinions differ. And this kind of listening goes beyond simply hearing words. It involves listening with our eyes through careful observation and with our hearts through empathy and understanding.

When Jesus healed the woman with the issue of blood, He possessed such keen awareness that He recognized the difference between her touch—filled with longing and faith—and the ordinary physical contact of the crowd pressing around Him.

This kind of active listening isn't about hearing just enough to craft a response. It's a higher form of listening: deeper, more intentional. It creates space for discernment and genuine understanding.

Of course, we are mortal. We all have moments when our listening and peacemaking skills might not be bringing home gold medals. In these moments, there is great power in the repair.



A [story](#) from the *Ensign* beautifully illustrates this. Mary, a tired young mom, decided to can peaches. She reached the stage where the filled jars needed to boil. She decided she'd catch a nap while she waited, because surely she would wake up in time. (This sounds like something I would do!)

Unfortunately, she didn't wake up soon enough. The heat built up inside the jars until they exploded. Mary rushed to the kitchen to find shattered glass and sticky peaches scattered everywhere. Overwhelmed, she decided to leave the mess until morning, which only made things worse. By the next day, the peaches had hardened around the shards of glass, forcing her to clean the mess slowly and carefully to avoid cutting herself.

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She writes, "As I cleaned, a familiar voice whispered to me: 'Mary, when your temper explodes, as did these jars, you cannot easily fix things. You cannot see where and how your anger hurts your children and others. Like this mess, that hurt hardens quickly and is painful.'"

Relatedly, President Russell M. Nelson, former president of The Church of Jesus Christ, taught about avoiding shards. He [said](#), "I hope that you will look deeply into your own heart to see if there are shards of pride or jealousy that prevent you from becoming a peacemaker."

We see the difference that a heart free from shards makes in moments of sudden stress. When a friend and her sister were recently rear-ended while stopped at a red light, my friend felt her anger boiling. Her sister, who was seated in the passenger seat next to her, gently put her hand on her leg and said, "They didn't mean to."

Peacemaking begins with humility—the willingness to listen, to understand, to apologize when needed. And if we're on the receiving end of contention, there is power in giving a soft answer to avoid escalating the contention.

The Spirit can enhance our thinking and our ability to communicate our thoughts and ideas, bring knowledge to our remembrance, and help bring out the best in us. It can

inspire and guide us in our words and actions. Nothing—certainly not contention—is worth the cost of losing that sacred companionship.

The Savior Was Passionate about the Truth

Another aspect of Christlike communication is passionately standing for **truth with great love**. When we hear the word “passion,” we may think of arguments, heated debates, or strong opinions. But Christlike passion looks very different. It isn’t harsh, reactive, defensive, or self-centered. Instead, it embodies the balance the prophet Mormon described: lovingly “speak[ing] with boldness” about the truth, “for **perfect love casteth out all fear**.”

Jesus was not passive. Christlike passion is love that acts when truth or souls matter. The Savior didn’t speak carelessly. He spoke deliberately, because He cared. And His words carried power because they were filled with eternal purpose. Christlike passion isn’t about raising our voices—it’s about raising our love as we communicate truth.

One powerful example from Christ’s ministry is the woman taken in adultery. Surrounded by accusation and shame, Christ responded by exposing the hypocrisy of the accusers, saying, “Let him who is **without sin** among you be the first to throw a stone at her.”

One by one, the accusers left. Jesus then created safety before offering correction:

He said, “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.”

In one sentence, He extended mercy while inviting change.

The word *passion* comes from the Late Latin word *passio*, meaning to suffer or endure. The Savior’s passion was His willingness to remain loving and obedient, even when that love required unfathomable suffering.

This kind of love leads naturally to what today we call being an upstander. As the name suggests, an upstander is someone willing to stand up and offer help, advocacy, or protection in the face of mistreatment, injustice, and bullying. It’s someone who refuses

to be passive in the face of harm. Someone who's willing to do the right thing even when it's unpopular, uncomfortable, or might draw social criticism.

A bystander observes. An upstander notices and acts.

An upstander is a lot like a shepherd, while a bystander is a lot like a hireling. As Elder James E. Talmage [wrote](#), "While the shepherd is ready to fight in defense of his own, and if necessary even imperil his life for his sheep, the hireling flees when the wolf approaches, leaving the way open for the ravening beast to scatter, rend, and kill."

Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, was the perfect upstander. He consistently stood up for people and against harm: He defended the woman taken in adultery. He called out hypocrisy that hurt the vulnerable. He stopped exploitation in the temple. None of that came from anger for anger's sake. It came from love with a backbone, or what I like to call gentle strength.

Christ stood against harm and stood with those who were most vulnerable. He also noticed those who were isolated, mocked, or alone—and He made room for them. This is passion in its most loving form.

We see this modern-day courage in the [story](#) of a popular high school football player who made sure that a young woman with disabilities felt loved and protected. As told by the young woman's mom:

I have a daughter with some disabilities that made her seem uncool in high school. She had a crush on a very popular football player and wanted to ask him to the Sweetheart's dance. I was so nervous about the idea and actually tried to dissuade her, thinking she would be made fun of, or that he would say no. He found out she wanted to ask him because she texted him for his address, and he spread the word to make sure no other girls asked him before she had the chance to ask first.

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He went with her to the dance and treated her like gold. My other daughter was also in the group, so I got details of the whole night. He was so kind, carried conversation, stayed with her the whole dance, and made sure she had the best time. This boy changed my daughter's entire high school experience through this one date. I was so thankful this boy could look past being cool or popular and focus on being kind and truly inclusive.

This is what we need in the world. This young man not only made a difference for that young woman, but he showed the young men around him that it's cool to do the right thing, the kind thing, the inclusive thing. That is an upstander. That is Christlike passion and courage.

Becoming Christlike Communicators

Becoming a Christlike communicator takes a lot more work than merely being civil. But the fruits of Christlike communication are much greater than what mere [civility](#) can produce.

Often, it's not grand gestures, but simple acts that help people feel loved and seen. It's in the way we communicate—both verbally and nonverbally.

Nelson [taught](#), “One of the easiest ways to identify a true follower of Jesus Christ is how compassionately that person treats other people.” It doesn't matter how educated, talented, wealthy, or popular we are—how we treat people speaks to who we are.

Christlike communicators don't have to seek the spotlight. They notice the person on the edges, and they bring them in. They pull up a chair. Ask a question. Make introductions. They build a bridge to create a space that wasn't there before. They are inclusive, even if that means thinking outside the box or giving up comfort or familiarity.

The Savior [taught](#), “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”

Christlike communication is putting people first. Choosing peace over pride. Speaking with love, even when it costs us. Putting down our phones to let people know that they

matter more than a device. When we love and communicate as He did, we strengthen our relationships, and those around us feel His love more fully.

About the author



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