

## **BYU on Being a Good Neighbor**

By Brenden Smith

Our BYU community is, in many respects, a model of all-American ideals: religious liberty, freedom of thought, and the equality of all men before God. Here is a place, built by pioneers seeking to build Zion, where people of all nationalities, races, and creeds are invited to “enter to learn,” then “go forth to serve.” As such, the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, which were addressed to America and to the faithful disciples of Christ, are of special significance to BYU students, faculty, and staff.

When reading and reflecting on his 1962 sermon, “On Being a Good Neighbor,” I saw how Dr. King emulated the example of our Savior, Jesus Christ, taking what might otherwise be an abstract theological virtue expressed in the Biblical parable and teaching his audience to “lift a bruised and beaten brother” themselves. This idea of making our faith concrete, our “passive commitment” into “active participation,” impressed on my mind. I thought that, in keeping with this principle, the best way to gain insight into Dr. King’s words would be to speak with others in the BYU community, to hear how they would “liken” Dr. King’s teachings to themselves.

My impromptu interviews took me across campus, from a Nepali student in Computer Science to a professor of Social Work; from scholars in the Religion department to a director in the Office of Belonging. I had only two questions for each person I met: first, What does it mean to you to “lift a... brother to a higher and more noble life?” And second, Was there a “time of challenge and controversy” where you lifted someone in this way, or were yourself lifted? In response, I received remarkable testimonies.

Some said that a higher and more noble life meant having equal dignity with their peers. One man spoke of the naturalization ceremonies that he helps to organize in the Hinkley Center, and the joy those shared moments of patriotism and belonging bring to family and friends. Another student spoke of how a class mentor had helped her feel at home at BYU, and kept her from feelings of isolation as an international student.

Other responses spoke of a higher “and holier” life, lifting people through true doctrine and by emulating Christ. One professor spoke of a moment where, while at a research conference on American Indian families, he made an insensitive remark in front of his colleagues by accident. But instead of taking offense or looking down on him, the others gave him grace and forgiveness, then passed the moment by. He has remembered that moment ever since, recalling the words of the prophet Joseph Smith that “there is no salvation in believing evil reports of our neighbor.” He believed that embracing the “higher law” of Jesus Christ meant we all would have to leave offenses behind and love our neighbors regardless.

In our modern world, perhaps the most difficult question is how we are to ennoble another's life, when we are so encouraged to isolate from one another, and our views of a "higher life" can sometimes contradict. But we have not been called to a safe form of altruism. We have been called to seek out our neighbor, one by one, and do good for him, even "excessively," or in dangerous circumstances to our own reputation, wealth, or safety.