

# Choosing Charity: That Good Part

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I invite you to not only love each other more but love each other better.

It's wonderful to be together as Relief Society sisters, covenant women in the Lord's restored gospel. Each of you—no matter your age, stage of life, or circumstance—is needed, valued, and loved in Relief Society. Thank you for who you are; thank you for all that you do.

In my office hangs a wonderful painting depicting Jesus with Mary and Martha.<sup>1</sup> Every day as I am greeted by this piece, I reflect on our challenges as women. Sister Hughes, Sister Pingree, and I felt inspired to use the account of Mary and Martha as the theme for our meeting. The Lord taught, one thing is needful: choose that good part.<sup>2</sup> That is what we are going to talk about tonight, choosing that good part.

Martha lived in the small village of Bethany, where she “received [Jesus] into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which *also* sat at Jesus' feet and heard his word.”<sup>3</sup> *Both* women loved the Lord. And “Jesus loved Martha, and [Mary].”<sup>4</sup> In fact, their relationship breached convention, for at that time women were not usually able to discuss the gospel with men.

On one occasion Martha was making dinner and, as the scripture says, “was cumbered about much serving.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, she was stressed out!

Mary, on the other hand, “sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word,”<sup>6</sup> while Martha became increasingly upset that no one was helping her. Does that sound familiar? Do you think she was thinking, “Why is Mary sitting there while I'm sweating over this stove?” So Martha turned to Jesus and said, “Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me.”<sup>7</sup>

The Lord's gentle invitation to Martha may have surprised her. “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”<sup>8</sup>

The Savior's response strikingly clarified what mattered most. On that evening in Martha's home, the good part was not in the kitchen; it was at the Lord's feet. Dinner could wait.

Like Mary, I hunger to feast at the Savior's feet, while, like Martha, I need to somehow find the laundry room floor, empty my in-box, and serve my husband something other than cold pizza. I have 15 grandchildren whose tender little spirits and daily challenges I want to better understand, yet I also have a slightly demanding Church calling! I don't have lots of time. Like all of you, I have to choose. We all are trying to choose the good part which

cannot be taken from us, to balance the spiritual and the temporal in our lives. Wouldn't it be easy if we were choosing between visiting teaching or robbing a bank? Instead, our choices are often more subtle. We must choose between many worthy options.

Mary and Martha are you and me; they are every sister in Relief Society. These two loved the Lord and wanted to show that love. On this occasion, it seems to me that Mary expressed her love by hearing His word, while Martha expressed hers by serving Him.

Martha thought she was doing right and that her sister should be helping her.

I don't believe the Lord was saying there are Marthas and there are Marys. Jesus did not dismiss Martha's concern, but instead redirected her focus by saying choose "that good part." And what is that? The prophet Lehi taught that we "should look to the great Mediator, and hearken unto his great commandments; and be faithful unto his words, and choose eternal life, according to the will of his Holy Spirit."<sup>9</sup>

The one thing that is needful is to choose eternal life. We choose daily. As we seek, listen, and follow the Lord, we are encircled in the arms of His love—a love that is pure.

Mormon teaches us that "charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever."<sup>10</sup> The pure love of Christ. Let's look at that. What does this phrase mean? We find part of the answer in Joshua: "Take diligent heed ... to love the Lord your God ... and to *serve him with all your heart and with all your soul.*"<sup>11</sup> Charity is *our* love for the Lord, shown through our acts of service, patience, compassion, and understanding for one another.

Additional insight into the pure love of Christ is found in Ether: "[Jesus has] loved the world, even unto the laying down of [His] life for the world, that [He might] take it again to prepare a place for the children of men. And now I know that *this love which [He has] for the children of men is charity.*"<sup>12</sup> Charity is *also* the *Lord's* love for us, shown through His acts of service, patience, compassion, and understanding.

The "pure love of Christ"<sup>13</sup> refers not only to *our* love for the Savior but to *His* love for each of us.

The story of Mary and Martha also illustrates how the gift of charity can be diminished. Within Martha's request for assistance was an unspoken but clear judgment: "I am right; she is wrong."

Do we judge one another? Do we criticize each other for individual choices, thinking we know better, when in fact we rarely understand another's unique circumstance or individual inspiration? Have we ever said, "She works outside the home." Or, "Her son didn't serve a mission." Or, "She's too old for a calling." Or, "She can't—she's single." Such judgments, and so many others like them, rob us of the good part, that pure love of Christ.

We also lose sight of that good part when we compare ourselves to others. Her hair is cuter, my legs are fatter, her children are more talented, or her garden's more productive—sisters, you know the drill. We just can't do that. We cannot allow ourselves to feel inadequate by focusing on who we *aren't* instead of on who we are! We are *all* sisters in Relief Society. We simply cannot criticize, gossip, or judge *and* keep the pure love of Christ. Can't you hear the Lord's sweet injunction: "Martha, Martha ... ?"

Elder Marvin J. Ashton beautifully observed: "Perhaps the greatest charity comes when we are kind to each other, when we don't judge or categorize someone else, when we simply give each other the benefit of the doubt or remain quiet. Charity is accepting someone's differences, weaknesses, and shortcomings; having patience

with someone who has let us down; or resisting the impulse to become offended when someone doesn't handle something the way we might have hoped. Charity is refusing to take advantage of another's weakness and being willing to forgive someone who has hurt us. Charity is expecting the best of each other."<sup>14</sup>

In exercising charity, we come to know a sister's heart. When we know a sister's heart, we are different. We won't judge her. We will simply love her. I invite you to not only love each other more but love each other *better*. As we do this we will come to know with a surety that "charity never faileth."<sup>15</sup>

As seemed the case with Martha, one of the first things to go when I become cumbered about and troubled is my charitable attitude. Is this true for you?

I've learned that the best way to reclaim charity is to *uncumber* myself and simply love and serve the Lord. How do we do that? We start each day kneeling in prayer to our Father in Heaven, we hear His words through daily scripture study, and we follow the guidance we receive. We put Christ first, restoring charity's circular love. "We love him, because he first loved us."<sup>16</sup> This is the reciprocating cycle of charity. Sisters, "charity never faileth."

When I received this calling, I desired with all my heart to have enough charity to genuinely love *every single sister* in the Church. I desired that my increased love would help you feel the love of the Lord in your life. I prayed to my Heavenly Father "with all the energy of [my] heart, [to be] filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon *all* who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ."<sup>17</sup>

Last December in Sunday School, our teacher suggested that at tithing settlement time we give the Lord a private accounting of our study and application of a gospel principle. I had the overwhelming feeling that my study should focus on charity. This prompting was confirmed in sacrament meeting, and I knew I had received direction from the Lord.

In associating with many of you, I have experienced overwhelming love for you and your goodness. I have been humbled by your sustaining support. My desires to serve you have deepened. These are the feelings of charity; these are answers to my prayers; these are some of the sweetest moments of my calling. I must have made some progress, because some of my children are asking why I've been so nice lately. This December I will give my Father in Heaven an accounting of my efforts to understand and exercise charity.

Just as He did with Mary and Martha, the Lord will show us that good part which shall not be taken from us. He will grant us charity, that pure love of Christ, for "charity never faileth."

Dear sisters, one thing is needful, to follow Him each day. Choose ye therefore Christ the Lord. Choose to feast upon His word. Choose to trust in Him above. Choose to wait upon His love. Choose to give Him all your heart. Choose ye therefore that good part.

For this I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. *Mary Heard His Word*, by Walter Rane, courtesy of Museum of Church History and Art.

2. See Luke 10:42.

3. Luke 10:38–39; emphasis added.

4. John 11:5.

5. Luke 10:40.

6. Luke 10:39.

7. Luke 10:40.

8. Luke 10:41–42.

9. 2 Ne. 2:28.

10. Moro. 7:47.

11. Josh. 22:5; emphasis added.

12. Ether 12:33–34; emphasis added.

13. Moro. 7:47.

14. “The Tongue Can Be a Sharp Sword,” *Ensign*, May 1992, 19.

15. Moro. 7:46.

16. 1 Jn. 4:19.

17. Moro. 7:48; emphasis added.

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