

Charity Never Faileth

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Plead for a desire to be filled with the gift of charity, the pure love of Christ.

My husband and I recently visited the city of Nauvoo, Illinois. While there we sat in the upper room of the Red Brick Store, where the Prophet Joseph Smith had an office and a business. We listened intently to the guide, who outlined some of the historical events of the Restoration which took place there.

My thoughts turned to the founding of the Relief Society and to some of the teachings that the Relief Society sisters received from the Prophet Joseph in that very room. Those teachings became the foundational principles upon which the Relief Society was built. The purposes of increasing faith, strengthening the homes of Zion, and seeking out and helping those in need were established from the beginning. They have always been consistent with the teachings of our prophets.

In one of those early meetings, the Prophet Joseph quoted from Paul’s writings to the Corinthians. In his powerful discourse on charity, Paul makes reference to faith, hope, and charity, concluding with, “But the greatest of these is charity.”¹

He describes the qualities embodied in charity. He said:

“Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

“... Seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

“Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

“Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

“Charity never faileth.”²

Speaking to the sisters, the Prophet Joseph said: “Don’t be limited in your views with regard to your neighbors’ virtues. ... You must enlarge your souls toward others if you [would] do like Jesus. ... As you increase in innocence and virtue, as you increase in goodness, let your hearts expand—let them be enlarged towards others—you must be longsuffering and bear with the faults and errors of mankind. How precious are the souls of men!”³

The scriptural declaration “Charity never faileth” became the motto of Relief Society because it embraces these teachings and the charge that the Prophet Joseph Smith had given the Relief Society sisters to “relieve the poor” and to “save souls.”⁴

These foundational principles have been embraced by Relief Society sisters throughout the world, for such is the nature of the work of Relief Society.

What is charity? How do we obtain charity?

The prophet Mormon defines charity as “the pure love of Christ,”⁵ while Paul teaches that “charity ... is the bond of perfectness,”⁶ and Nephi reminds us that “the Lord God hath given a commandment that all men should have charity, which charity is love.”⁷

In reviewing Paul’s previous description of charity, we learn that charity is not a single act or something we give away but a state of being, a state of the heart, kind feelings that engender loving actions.

Mormon also teaches that charity is bestowed upon the Lord’s true disciples and that charity purifies those who have it.⁸ In addition, we learn that charity is a divine gift which we must seek and pray for. We need to have charity in our hearts in order to inherit the celestial kingdom.⁹

With the understanding that the Lord has asked us to “clothe [our]selves with the bond of charity,”¹⁰ we must ask what qualities will help us develop charity.

We must first have the desire to increase in charity and be more Christlike.

The next step is to pray. Mormon exhorts us to “pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that [we] may be filled with this love.” This godly love is charity, and as we are filled with this love, so “we shall be like him.”¹¹

Reading scriptures daily can bring our minds to the Savior and to a desire to be more like Him.

In my office I chose to hang a painting by Minerva Teichert titled *Rescue of the Lost Lamb*. It depicts the Savior standing among His sheep and tenderly holding a small lamb in His arms. It helps me reflect on His entreaty: “Feed my sheep,”¹² which to me means minister to all those around you and give special attention to those in need.

The Savior is the perfect example of how to extend charity. During His mortal ministry He showed compassion for the hungry, for the sinner, for the afflicted, and for the sick. He ministered to the poor and to the rich; to women, children, and men; to family, friends, and strangers. He forgave His accusers, and He suffered and died for all mankind.

Throughout his life the Prophet Joseph Smith also practiced charity as he extended brotherly love and respect to others. He was well known for his kindness, affection, compassion, and concern for those around him.

Today we are blessed to have a prophet who embodies charity. President Thomas S. Monson is an example to us and to the world. He wears the mantle of charity. He is kind, compassionate, and generous, a true minister of the Lord Jesus Christ.

President Monson teaches: “Charity is having patience with someone who has let us down. It is resisting the impulse to become offended easily. It is accepting weaknesses and shortcomings. It is accepting people as they truly are. It is looking beyond physical appearances to attributes that will not dim through time. It is resisting the impulse to categorize others.”¹³

When we have charity, we are willing to serve and help others when it is inconvenient and with no thought of recognition or reciprocation. We don't wait to be assigned to help, because it becomes our very nature. As we choose to be kind, caring, generous, patient, accepting, forgiving, inclusive, and selfless, we discover we are abounding in charity.

Relief Society provides countless ways to serve others. One of the most important ways to practice charity is through visiting teaching. Through effective visiting teaching we have many opportunities to love, minister, and serve others. Expressing charity, or love, purifies and sanctifies our souls, helping us become more like the Savior.

I marvel as I witness the countless acts of charity performed daily by visiting teachers all over the world who selflessly minister to the needs of individual sisters and their families. To these faithful visiting teachers, I say, "Through those small acts of charity, you follow the Savior and you act as instruments in His hands as you help, care, lift, comfort, listen, encourage, nurture, teach, and strengthen the sisters under your care." Let me share some brief examples of such ministry.

Rosa suffers from debilitating diabetes and other ailments. She joined the Church a few years ago. She is a single mother with an adolescent son. She frequently has to be hospitalized for a few days at a time. Her kind visiting teachers not only take her to the hospital, but they visit and comfort her at the hospital while also watching over her son at home and school. Her visiting teachers serve as her friends and family.

After the first few visits to a particular sister, Kathy discovered that this sister didn't know how to read but wanted to learn. Kathy offered to help her even though she knew it would take time, patience, and constancy.

Emily is a young wife who was in search of the truth. Her husband, Michael, was less interested in religion. When Emily became ill and spent some time in the hospital, Cali, a Relief Society sister who is also her neighbor, took the family meals, watched their baby, cleaned the house, and arranged for Emily to receive a priesthood blessing. These acts of charity softened Michael's heart. He decided to attend Church meetings and to meet with the missionaries. Emily and Michael were recently baptized.

"Charity never faileth. ... Charity ... is kind, ... seeketh not her own, ... beareth all things, endureth all things." ¹⁴

President Henry B. Eyring said:

"The history of the Relief Society is filled with accounts of such remarkable selfless service. ...

"This society is composed of women whose feelings of charity spring from hearts changed by qualifying for and by keeping covenants offered only in the Lord's true Church. Their feelings of charity come from Him through His Atonement. Their acts of charity are guided by His example—and come out of gratitude for His infinite gift of mercy—and by the Holy Spirit, which He sends to accompany His servants on their missions of mercy. Because of that, they have done and are able to do uncommon things for others and to find joy even when their own unmet needs are great." ¹⁵

Providing service and extending charity toward others helps us overcome our own difficulties and makes them seem less challenging.

I now return to the teachings of the Prophet Joseph to the sisters in the early days of the Restoration. Urging the

practices of charity and benevolence, he said: “If you live up to these principles, how great and glorious will be your reward in the celestial kingdom! If you live up to your privileges, the angels cannot be restrained from being your associates.”¹⁶

Like in the early days in Nauvoo, where the sisters went about seeking and helping those in need, so it is today. Sisters in the kingdom are great pillars of spiritual strength, compassionate service, and devotion. Dedicated visiting teachers visit and care for one another. They follow the Savior’s example and do as He did.

All women in Relief Society can be filled with love, knowing that their small acts of charity have a healing power for others and for themselves. They come to know with certainty that charity is the pure love of Christ and never faileth.

When you read the Relief Society history, it will inspire you to discover that this important gospel principle is a thread woven through the whole book.

I conclude with an invitation to all the women in the Church to plead for a desire to be filled with the gift of charity, the pure love of Christ. Use all your resources to do good, bringing relief and salvation to those around you, including your own family. The Lord will crown your efforts with success.

May our knowledge of the great love that the Father and the Son have for us, and our faith and gratitude for the Atonement, move us to develop and exercise charity toward all those around us. This is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. 1 Corinthians 13:13.

2. 1 Corinthians 13:4–8.

3. Joseph Smith, in *Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society* (2011), 23.

4. Joseph Smith, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 17.

5. Moroni 7:47.

6. Colossians 3:14.

7. 2 Nephi 26:30.

8. See Moroni 7:48.

9. See Ether 12:34; Moroni 10:21.

10. Doctrine and Covenants 88:125.

11. Moroni 7:48.

12. See John 21:16–17.

13. Thomas S. Monson, “Charity Never Faileth,” *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 124.

14. 1 Corinthians 13:4–5, 7–8.

15. Henry B. Eyring, “The Enduring Legacy of Relief Society,” *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2009, 121.

16. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 454.