

Charity: How We Treat Each Other

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It is such a pleasure to be with you. I'm especially glad to be here this week because we are celebrating the Relief Society Sesquicentennial. We celebrate 150 years of Relief Society service and sisterhood. That is an accomplishment I'm very proud to share with you.

Relief Society is glorious because we join as sisters who come unto Christ. In all our roles as sisters, wives, mothers, daughters, friends, roommates, teachers, leaders, and on and on, we strive to come to the Savior. I know how rich our Relief Society sisterhood can be because of what each of us brings to it. Think about how unified we feel and yet how individual we are.

The women who founded the Relief Society consisted of eleven married women, two widows, six unmarried women, and one whose marital status is unknown. They ranged in age from three teenagers to one woman in her fifties. They were all converts, and some had been converted when they were very young. They lived in different sections of town and in varying economic circumstances. This campus is like that first Relief Society—full of diverse, interesting, faithful women.

Belle Spafford, a general president of the Relief Society, said, "Relief Society is only on the threshold of its divine mission" (*History of Relief Society, 1842–1966* [Salt Lake City: General Board of Relief Society, 1966], p. 140). I echo that sentiment. And I add that because of women like you, we shall cross that threshold and bless the world in ways our founding mothers may never have dreamed of. I am confident that as the women of Zion earnestly seek to expand their faith, cultivate deeper hope, and develop and exercise charity, we shall walk past that threshold into a new realm of spiritual awareness and light.

Brethren, don't think I've forgotten you when I talk about Relief Society. I haven't. As men and women we work together in building the kingdom of God. Just as discussions about priesthood apply to all of us, so do discussions about the principles of Relief Society apply to all. I talk a little about Relief Society today so

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all of us male and female—might better appreciate the significance of individual spirituality and faith. It is because of faithful men and women that the Relief Society was founded and the Church has flourished.

Brothers and sisters, I know how good you are. I know because I observe you closely whenever I'm on campus, and I see many Christlike qualities in your daily interactions with others. I am pleased as I watch you treat each other with kindness and love. I also think on this historic occasion of the Relief Society's 150th year about how many wonderful things will occur in the world because of you.

Emma Smith, the first general president of the Relief Society, said, "We are going to do something extraordinary. We expect extraordinary occasions and pressing calls" (*Minutes of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo*, 17 March 1842, p. 8). Brothers and sisters, I say that in this day we are going to do something extraordinary. We are going to do something extraordinary because *you* are extraordinary.

You may think that is just so much rhetoric. You may say to yourself, "How can Elaine Jack say that? She doesn't know me. She can't predict what I'll do." True, I don't know each of you. But I feel confident you will do many extraordinary things. I know you will, in fact. I know because I watch you, and, therefore, I know a great deal about you. For example, I learned a lot just watching you walk in the Marriott Center today. I learned that over there is a young man who has a lot of friends. He seems to be having a terrific time at the Y. Back farther is a woman who is tired. I think she is having a rough week. I could go on, but you get the point.

Every time I visit this campus, I look at you and marvel. I think of President Benson's prophetic comments:

All through the ages prophets have looked down through the corridors of time to our day. Billions of the deceased and those yet to be born have their eyes

on us. Make no mistake about it—This is a marked generation. There has never been more expected of the faithful in such a short time than there is [of] us. [California Institute Address, February 1986]

I know many of you have heard such talk for years. It may not yet mean much to you, but it will, for it is true. And because I know all of us alive today are included in the generation of those who must be prepared to meet our God, I often ask myself, "Elaine, how are you doing? How is your faith? What is the quality of your personal preparation?" I'll tell you how I answer those questions. I consider how I treat other people. I look at my own works, and they tell me very quickly the state of my testimony.

"How do I treat other people?" It is an important question. The Lord taught:

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. [John 13:34–35]

That scripture explains why I measure my own spiritual progress by asking myself, "How do I treat others?" I said a moment ago that we are only on the threshold of a new era of individual spirituality and faith. I believe we shall cross that threshold in these times. We shall cross it one person at a time. We shall cross it as we individually become more Christlike people.

In the Relief Society we have a motto: Charity Never Faileth. This is a motto of such spiritual force that I hope every woman in the Church will make it her personal motto. Notice that the scriptures about charity in Moroni 7 and 1 Corinthians don't say, "charity usually never faileth" or, "charity almost always never faileth." They say, "Charity never faileth." Mormon explained:

If ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth. Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all, for all things must fail—

But charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him [and her]. [Moroni 7:46–47]

Charity is love—not just earthly love or temporary love, but the pure love of Christ. Charity is so important that we must have it in our lives. It is not just nice to possess charity; it is essential.

I'm proud to belong to a group of women defined by charity—the Relief Society. The Relief Society was founded to do good in the world, and we're intent on this goal. The lives of charitable women are so imbued with the pure love of our Savior that charity is the way we think and act every day of our lives.

The Savior explained that when he shall come in his glory,

And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:

And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. [Matthew 25:32–40]

In rereading that scripture recently, I was struck by the fact that the righteous didn't seem to recognize the Savior in the service they gave to others. I wonder if this was because they had developed the attributes of charity to such a degree in their lives that it was just natural for them to take care of the others around them. They may not have stopped to think, "Oh, I am giving service." They were probably busy living every day of their lives in a way that demonstrated that charity was the foundation of all their actions.

I would like to be such a person—a woman who naturally blesses others' lives. I know many of you do a lot to bless others' lives. How do I know? Again, from watching how you treat each other.

Joy is a BYU student from China. Not a member of our faith, Joy is attending law school. She is bright and gifted and is here because she was impressed with the moral standards exhibited by BYU groups that toured China. When she arrived here, she spoke only limited English, so the first year of law school was very difficult.

An accreditation team visited the law school to investigate the possibility of a one-year course in international law. They felt that the law school was weak in tutoring international students, so they were invited to interview several students from other countries, Joy among them.

When the team queried her about available tutorial help, she said, "I have so much tutoring help I can't use it all. I know that I could ask anyone of twenty students for help, depending on what I needed."

The team members asked her about the structure of the tutoring time. She replied,

“Students tutor on their own time. I can go to them whenever I need help.”

Thank you, you twenty law students who offered your help to Joy. And thank you, Joy, for adding new dimensions to the lives of those twenty.

My dear brothers and sisters, treating each other well should be your highest priority. Paul said,

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.
[1 Corinthians 13:3]

To me this means that one-time service projects don’t mean much unless I develop the attributes of charity in my life. The Savior said that the “great commandment in the law” is “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matthew 22:36–37). Charity reflects that pervasive love. When we love the Lord with all our mind, soul, and heart, we will love others. For the Lord added a second commandment, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:39).

So what is charity? Mormon defined it as “the pure love of Christ” (Moroni 7:47) and as “everlasting love” (Moroni 8:17). He also listed some components of charity:

And charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. [Moroni 7:45]

In one verse of scripture I have a comprehensive list of do’s and don’ts on which I can base my treatment of others.

I want to talk about just two of those points, but, please, ponder the rest of them.

Have you ever wondered what “charity suffereth long” means? It doesn’t mean that charity is a painful process. It is saying that charity is patient. It doesn’t give up on others. *Suffer* means to wait patiently, to tolerate, to hold out, to allow. I do not equate “long-suffering” or “patient” charity with submissiveness to others or lack of energy. Quite the opposite—charity is energetically persistent in reaching its goals. It is submissive only to the Spirit of the Lord.

Sometimes the most important thing we do for others is to suffer long in their behalf. A teaching assistant helps a struggling statistics student, a tutor reviews German verb tenses one more time, a roommate gently requests that the garbage be taken out, a spouse makes another attempt at homemade cherry pie. In these and hundreds of cases we have the opportunity to “suffer long.”

This is the suffering that works understanding. It reminds us that others have been patient with us, that the process of individual growth means we take turns suffering long and being suffered for.

I often think of my first months as a member of a stake Relief Society presidency in New York City. I was in my twenties and had served only briefly in Relief Society before. The other wise and experienced presidency members were so thorough in walking me through my responsibilities. I still made a lot of mistakes—and was patiently rescued each time. They suffered long.

Charity is kind. The word *kind* suggests the simple actions, the tender way of speaking, the gentle touch—all of those effective ways of influencing others that you and I do habitually every day when we have developed a charitable way of thinking.

Be kind. Even if the blind date is a disaster, be kind. The memories you make now are permanent memories. I still recall how I felt about social experiences in college. I remember which roommates were kind to me. You’ll remember,

too, so do your best to create good memories for others. Be kind to them.

I have thought a lot about the kind things that can bring joy into people's lives. My sister brings joy into mine. Even though we each have our own circle of friends, we love being together. I haven't seen her as much as I would have liked this past couple of years, but when I'm crunched she'll look for a blouse I need or leave some soup and bread at the back door when I've been away. Those little things seem like big things to me. I think of them as fine acts of charity.

Brothers and sisters, our small acts of charitable service give others opportunities to receive. Usually we think of the bishop as the one who dispenses the comfort and advice needed in a ward to his family and to others. But when death took the son of her bishop and his wife, JoAnne spent countless hours talking with the grieving mother. JoAnne demonstrated a real ability to rely on the Spirit as she attempted to help. Her Ph.D. study is in death and grieving, so she knew how to help from a clinical as well as a sisterly perspective. JoAnne's skill and spiritual sensitivity blessed a whole family. The mother told others in the ward that JoAnne often answered her prayers through an unexpected phone call or visit.

When I heard the story, I felt good that the bishop and his wife let JoAnne have this opportunity to give as a way of expressing her love and sympathy. This was that family's season to be the receivers and JoAnne's time to be the giver.

To develop this ability of truly helping others takes practice and the desire to learn. Fortunately, the Lord has taught us ways we can develop the attributes of charity. Let me share several of them with you.

Personal prayer: This calling to be Relief Society general president has driven me to my knees very often. I so earnestly desire the well-being of all of our sisters, and of you brethren as well. I care about the welfare of each BYU

student. One of the greatest blessings that has come into my life is this opportunity to pray for so many others. I feel as the Psalmist said, "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray" (Psalms 55:17). I learn more about love as I pray for others. I also learn that while the Lord will hear my prayers, he will answer them in his time and in his way. But he is always there.

Several years ago my good friend Carol led a tour group to the then Soviet Union. This was just as Gorbachev was coming to power and "perestroika" was only being introduced into our Western vocabularies. When this tour group was attempting to leave the Soviet Union, the border guards decided their visas were insufficient. My friend and her group were forced off a train at the border of the Soviet Union and Hungary at 4:00 a.m. with no access to a telephone, fax machine, or telegraph, let alone a hotel. Carol said that as she watched the border guards literally throw their luggage from the train windows, she thought, "It is a good thing I already know the Lord answers prayers because now would be a poor time to question it." Carol prayed that the Lord would bless her to respond kindly to those who had put her in this hard spot. She prayed that the Lord would bless others to be kind to her group as well. The Lord did bless them, and there was a happy ending to that adventure.

Scripture study: One of the best parts of scripture study for me is that various passages increase in personal meaning as I have new experiences. One such passage reads: "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a [woman], I put away childish things" (1 Corinthians 13:11).

When I was a young college student living far from my family, I did not understand the peace and direction that I now know can come from the scriptures. I am sorry that part of my life passed without this knowledge. I could have gotten more comfort and insight than

I did. When I was a young mother, I used the scriptures more to help my sons grow in their gospel understanding. Now I am exhilarated by the truths I learn in the scriptures.

A year ago a college student told me how foolish she felt giving a spiritual message to the women she visit teaches. “They’re my friends,” she explained. “We don’t talk about things like that, and we see each other at church anyway, so I just feel silly giving them a spiritual message.” I have felt sad all year about her comments. It hurts me that this woman has closed herself off from the means of building some of the deepest and most meaningful friendships she could ever know.

Sharing the gospel with others is one of the richest blessings of my life. Through scriptural discussions I’ve learned a great deal about charity by hearing other people’s insights.

Some of my favorite passages in the scriptures are verses I’ve discussed with my friend Carolyn Rasmus. Whenever Carolyn and I talked about a scripture, I put her initials by it so I could remember better what we discussed. Carolyn has deepened my insights into scriptures that I’ve read many times but never thought of in the ways she has. I’ve loved these moments shared with her.

One of my general board members recently told me about a friendship she has developed as a result of sharing the scriptures. She and an associate had a long drive together. The associate, who was driving, asked if my friend would read some passages of the Book of Mormon to her. They started in Mosiah. Soon they were discussing their testimonies as they shared sections of Ether and Moroni. My friend learned from the way her traveling companion had marked the scriptures. They both learned about each other, and they felt the spirit of the Lord. A friendship blossomed from that spiritual sharing that would never have unfolded otherwise.

I hope sharing the scriptures and your testimony with others is an important part of your

life. If you haven’t added the scriptural dimension to your friendships yet, try it, you’ll like it.

These words of Nephi are significant to me:

And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins. [2 Nephi 25:26]

My friends, as part of your daily comings and goings, I pray that you will feel it in your heart to echo Nephi—to talk of, rejoice in, and preach of Christ. Nothing can teach you charity faster.

In addition to personal prayer and scripture study, the Lord has taught us to freely give. He taught, “Freely ye have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8). The Lord wants us to do what we can—and do it lovingly. I know that many of you at BYU follow the Savior’s teachings—you freely give. Marilyn Arnold shared a story of some BYU students who freely gave much needed help. Her elderly parents were out walking one evening when her father fell and seriously cut his arms. Some students were walking by and saw him go down. They immediately came to his aid, saw that he got medical attention, and made sure that both her parents were taken care of. They subsequently called at their home several times to see how her father was recovering.

What the Lord teaches us is that each of us should do what is ours to do. I asked Jason Hall to tell me of acts of charity he has experienced on campus. He said,

The greatest acts of charity I’ve experienced are little acts, the kind words and kind deeds. I remember one time I was sitting in front of a big group, waiting to give a talk. I was very scared, and my tie was a little crooked. The girl I brought with me came and straightened my tie, looked at me, and said, “I think you’re great.” I remember the impact that had on me; the nerves were gone because

I knew that someone thought I was okay. Due to the kind word of a friend, my entire attitude had changed. For me, that is what charity is all about.

Jason's friend did what was hers to do. And, brothers and sisters, that is what the Lord asks of each of us.

I like the story of Janice. She is majoring in engineering, and to keep herself in school works summers in a hard hat and boots in an oil field in Long Beach, California. Last year she spent the bulk of her afternoons and evenings helping young mothers in her ward. One of these women reported that Janice spent over twenty hours helping her sort, clean, and rearrange furniture for the new baby. She did volunteer baby-sitting for other ward members. When these young mothers compared notes, they discovered that Janice had helped all of them during the few weeks she was home that summer.

When we are willing, the Lord can use us as the means of blessing each other. I am always grateful when someone reaches a hand out to me or to one of my family. I am always grateful when I can give my hand to someone who may need me.

A lot of women speak to me about how lonely they are. Some of them attend this university. I generally suggest that they think about how many hands they have held in the last week. I don't presume that going from person to person in the spirit of service conquers all of our problems. But I know from my own experience that doing for others often puts life in a clearer perspective. It reminds us that our individual circumstances are not the only set of circumstances in the whole world or even in the dorm. Reaching out to someone else can help us shake loose some of our own inwardness. It can let us be part of the solution to problems, rather than the creation of them.

Allison is a very popular track star and communications major. One night she and her friend Becky were heading for a group date.

Allison stopped at the bottom of the stairs, asked Becky to wait a moment, and then ran back to the apartment. She returned with a blanket, which she quietly slipped around a homeless man standing on the street corner. What a nice example of following the Lord's direction that we freely give.

Here is another good charitable habit. Phone home. Especially call your mother. Parents need your nurturing and support, just as you need theirs. Even if your relationship isn't the best, call your mother and father.

Say "thank you" often. When a professor writes a comprehensive comment on your paper, say "thank you." When a roommate teaches your Sunday School lesson, say "thank you." When a spouse cleans the apartment, say "thank you." When a home teacher brings you cookies, say "thank you." When a visiting teacher repairs your leaking toilet, say "thank you." When a neighbor takes your child, say "thank you." When a friend mails you a letter, say "thank you." When a grocery store clerk is helpful, say "thank you." The Lord has told us to be a thankful people. One way we do that is by acknowledging the kindnesses—large and small—that others show us.

Another charitable habit: Lighten up and chill out. Take a healthy helping of enjoyment and laughter from the smorgasbord of life's experiences. And give some to your neighbors and friends. While we don't choose all that lands on our plates, we may choose some of the trimmings. Laughter is a condiment that makes just about anything go down better. And the ability to enjoy life with all its frustrations and diversity is like a good sorbet—it freshens the palate. Good humor refreshes me as nothing else can. Sharing a good laugh with someone is often an act of charity.

Brothers and sisters, I salute you for the many small charitable acts you do that mean so much to others. I hope this Relief Society sesquicentennial year will be the time when you decide your life will be something

extraordinary. I pray you will follow Mormon's counsel about charity:

Wherefore, my beloved brethren [and sisters], pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son,

Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons [and daughters] of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure. [Moroni 7:48]

I say this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.