

CHANGING OUR HEARTS THROUGH **Charity**

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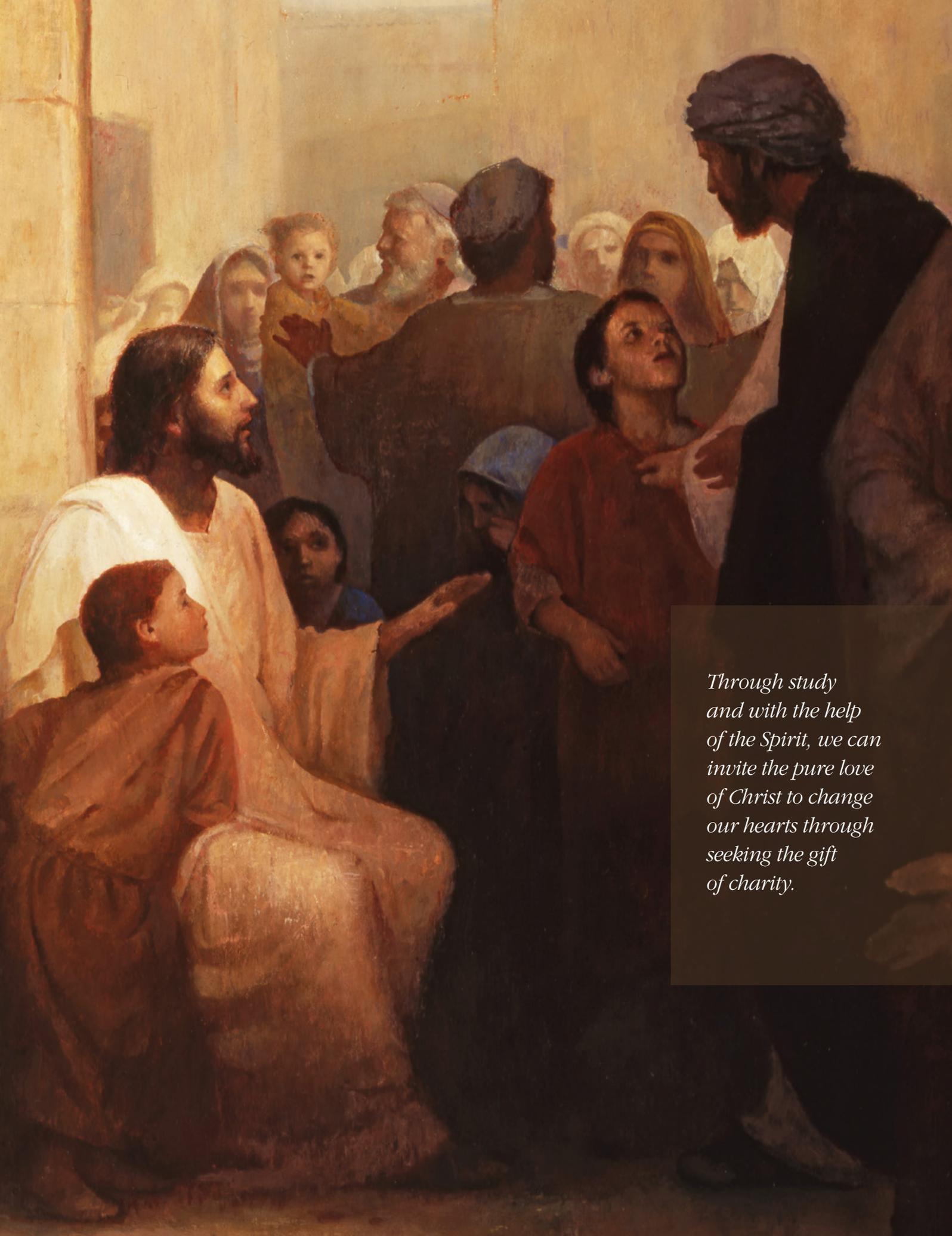
Some time ago, while serving in the Primary presidency in my ward, I was approached by a dedicated and capable Primary teacher. She was from another country, and though her English was not perfect, the children could understand her, and she was well loved because of her spiritual lessons. That day, however, she was not happy. With great sadness she explained that a parent had asked her why someone who didn't speak English well could be called to teach children. Though the teacher loved the children in her class, she tearfully wondered if perhaps they would benefit from a different teacher who spoke better English. I assured her that she was called of God and that He wanted her with those many students who loved her and were benefiting from her spiritual preparedness.



As I pondered the incident, I wasn't upset with the parent. I realized that he or she had misunderstood the situation and made a mistake in judgment. Yet I was sad that it had happened, especially when this good teacher already felt different and perhaps excluded in a ward full of native English speakers.

Then I began to remember the times when I had inadvertently hurt someone's feelings or made thoughtless statements to people who were different from me. My heart began to ache for those who, like this teacher, felt different, judged, or excluded because of things I might have said

without thinking. I wondered how we in the Church could increase in love and sensitivity and be able to reach out as the Savior did to all people in all circumstances so that no one would ever feel alone. The answer, I realized through study and with the help of the Spirit, was to invite the pure love of Christ to change our hearts through seeking the gift of charity.



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Charity Is a Gift

When Christ was on the earth He loved all people with a perfect love. Even after wicked men scourged Him and nailed Him to the cross, He pleaded, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

Sometimes we as imperfect beings find it difficult to love others. Because we are human and encumbered by the natural man, it is not always easy to see other people as the Savior does. But as we fervently pray and follow the Savior’s example of performing acts of love toward others, we are given the gift of charity. Through this gift we are changed by the power of the Holy Ghost to become more like the Savior, and we then receive the power to see others through His eyes.¹

We learn from Mormon that prayer is one of the acts that can help us experience this change (see Moroni 7:48). And in 1 Corinthians 13, the Apostle Paul further explains this gift from God.

Charity Suffereth Long and Is Kind

Jesus, who in the midst of a demanding crowd said, “Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me” (Matthew 19:14), taught us that no one is too small or unworthy of our patient care, no matter how important our tasks may be.

Chad (names have been changed) learned about the rewards of patience with others who were different when he received a calling to work alongside a couple with slight mental and physical disabilities. Chad worked with the husband over a period of years to teach him how to speak in front of others and conduct a meeting. He also helped gently guide the wife toward positive social interactions. “I’ve found joy in seeing this couple, who have a hard life due to mental and physical issues, be part of something successful and feel that it was a result of their work,” says Chad. “As I have worked with them, my love for them has grown. I am able to look past their challenges and see the strengths and talents they have.”



Charity Envieth Not and Is Not Puffed Up

Sometimes feelings of pride prevent us from reaching out to others who need our friendship. Miranda found this to be the case when a new sister moved into her ward. The woman dressed and talked differently than most people in the ward, and consequently, many sisters didn’t associate with her. When Miranda’s husband noticed, he suggested they invite this sister and her family to dinner. Miranda was nervous about the idea, but she decided to follow her husband’s suggestion. She says, “Even though I thought there was no way I could connect with this sister at any level because we were so different, I knew it was the right thing to do.”

To Miranda’s surprise, when the new family came over, the two families had a lot of fun. The husbands formed a lasting friendship, and Miranda developed a love and respect for the sister, who, Miranda learned, had spent part of her childhood being homeless. She says, “Because I got to know this sister, I was able to better understand her. When we take the time to find out where people are coming from, it is easier to understand why they do the things they do.”

Charity Doth Not Behave Itself Unseemly

Through His example of quiet dignity during times of stress, the Savior taught us that we have the power to control our thoughts and our tongues. One sister who went through a divorce appreciated her ward family's Christlike refusal to gossip about or judge her situation. "It was nice to feel like I was safe when the sisters in the ward reached out to help me," she says. "It meant so much when they withheld their judgment. They just reached out in love and kindness to help where help was needed."

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught: "Our wards and branches should be places where the Golden Rule always guides our words and actions toward each other. By treating each other kindly, speaking words of support and encouragement, and being sensitive to each other's needs, we can create loving unity among ward members. Where charity exists, there is no place for gossip or unkind words."²

Charity Seeketh Not Her Own

The Savior sacrificed Himself freely as a gift to us (see John 10:17–18). Because He understood our pain, He wanted to help us be restored to joy with our Heavenly Father.

We too can give gifts of empathy and selflessness. When we try to feel others' pain, we see them as the Savior does and will have an increased desire to help them. One single sister found she was able to empathize with those who sat by themselves at church after all her children had moved away. Rather than focus on her own loneliness, she searched for opportunities to serve others who might be lonely. She said,

"I began to look around and found others sitting alone at church. I sat with them, befriended and served them, and shared their burdens, and in return, I found mine were lightened."

Charity Never Faileth

Through the parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus expressed His great concern for those who might feel alone, different, or excluded: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40).

We show our love for the Savior and assist Him in His great work when we seek the gift of charity through fervent prayer and acts of kindness. As we do this we will be transformed, little by little, to become more like our Savior, Jesus Christ. Our sensitivity and concern for those who might need our love will increase, and we will have the power to see beauty and goodness in the hearts of all people in all circumstances, as He does.

President Thomas S. Monson taught: "We are all spirit children of our Heavenly Father and, as such, are brothers and sisters. As we keep this truth in mind, loving all of God's children will become easier."³

May we increasingly think and act like Christ in reaching out and being sensitive to the needs of our brothers and sisters who may feel different or alone. Our joy will grow as we experience the gift of charity, the pure love of Christ. ■

NOTES

1. See Dallin H. Oaks, "The Challenge to Become," *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 32–34.
2. M. Russell Ballard, "Finding Joy through Loving Service," *Ensign*, May 2011, 47.
3. Thomas S. Monson, "Love—the Essence of the Gospel," *Ensign*, May 2014, 91.



SMALL GIFTS OF CHARITY

"Those who wholeheartedly turn their lives over to our Savior and serve God and fellowman discover a richness and fulness to life that the selfish or egotistic will never experience. The unselfish give of themselves. These may be small gifts of charity that have a grand impact for good: a smile, a handshake, a hug, time spent in listening, a soft word of encouragement, or a gesture of caring. All these acts of kindness can change hearts and lives. When we take advantage of the unlimited opportunities to love and serve our fellowmen, including our spouse and family, our capacity to love God and to serve others will greatly increase."

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, "Are You Sleeping through the Restoration?" *Ensign*, May 2014, 59.