

Charity

Chapter 30

What Is Charity?

- How would you define charity?

The life of the Savior reflects His pure love for all people. He even gave His life for us. Charity is that pure love which our Savior Jesus Christ has. He has commanded us to love one another as He loves us. The scriptures tell us that charity comes from a pure heart (see 1 Timothy 1:5). We have pure love when, from the heart, we show genuine concern and compassion for all our brothers and sisters.

Charity Is the Greatest of All Virtues

The prophet Mormon tells us, “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” (Moroni 7:46–47; see also 1 Corinthians 13; 2 Nephi 26:30; Moroni 7:44–45, 48).

The Savior gave us the example of His life to follow. He was the Son of God. He had perfect love, and He showed us how to love. By His example, He showed us that the spiritual and physical needs of our fellowmen are as important as our own. Before He gave His life for us, He said:

“This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:12–13).

Speaking to the Lord, Moroni said:

“I remember that thou hast said that thou hast loved the world, even unto the laying down of thy life for the world. . . .



“And now I know that this love which thou hast had for the children of men is charity; wherefore, except men shall have charity they cannot inherit that place which thou hast prepared in the mansions of thy Father” (Ether 12:33–34).

It may not be necessary for us to give our lives as the Savior did. But we can have charity if we make Him the center of our lives and follow His example and teachings. Like the Savior, we too can bless the lives of our brothers and sisters here on earth.

- Why is charity the greatest of all virtues?

Charity Includes Giving to the Sick, Afflicted, and Poor

The Savior gave us many teachings in the form of stories or parables. The parable of the good Samaritan teaches us that we should give to those in need, regardless of whether they are our friends or not (see Luke 10:30–37; see also James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 3rd ed. [1916], 430–32). In the parable, the Savior said that a man was traveling to another city. On the road he was attacked by bandits. They stole his clothes and money and beat him, leaving him half dead. A priest came along, saw him, and passed him by. Then a temple attendant walked over, looked at him, and went on. However, a Samaritan, who was despised by the Jews, came along, and when he saw the man he felt compassion (see the picture in this chapter). Kneeling beside him, the good Samaritan bandaged his wounds and took him on a donkey to an inn. He paid the innkeeper to take care of the man until he recovered.

Jesus taught that we should give food to the hungry, shelter to those who have none, and clothes to the poor. When we visit the sick and those who are in prison, it is as if we were doing these things for Him instead. He promises that as we do these things, we will inherit His kingdom. (See Matthew 25:34–46.)

We should not try to decide whether someone really deserves our help or not (see Mosiah 4:16–24). If we have taken care of our own family's needs first, then we should help all who need help. In this way we will be like our Father in Heaven, who causes rain to fall on the just and on the unjust alike (see Matthew 5:44–45).

President Thomas S. Monson reminded us that there are those who need more than material goods:

“Let us ask ourselves the questions: ‘Have I done any good in the world today? Have I helped anyone in need?’ [*Hymns*, no. 223]. What a formula for happiness! What a prescription for contentment, for inner peace—to have inspired gratitude in another human being.

“Our opportunities to give of ourselves are indeed limitless, but they are also perishable. There are hearts to gladden. There are kind words to say. There are gifts to be given. There are deeds to be done. There are souls to be saved” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2001, 72; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 60).

- In the parable of the good Samaritan, how would you describe those who passed the injured man? How would you describe the Samaritan? In what ways can we apply the message of this parable in our lives?

Charity Comes from the Heart

- How can we love people in spite of their sins and faults?

Even when we give to those in need, unless we feel compassion for them we do not have charity (see 1 John 3:16–17). The Apostle Paul taught that when we have charity we are filled with good feelings for all people. We are patient and kind. We are not boastful or proud, selfish or rude. When we have charity we do not remember or rejoice in the evil others have done. Neither do we do good things just because it is to our advantage. Instead, we share the joy of those who live by truth. When we have charity we are loyal, we believe the best of others, and we are kind to them. The scriptures teach that “charity never faileth.” (See 1 Corinthians 13:4–8.)

The Savior was our example of how to feel toward and treat others. He despised wickedness, but He loved sinners in spite of their sins. He had compassion for children, the elderly, the poor, and the needy. He had such great love that He could beg our Heavenly Father to forgive the soldiers who drove the nails into His hands and feet (see Luke 23:34). He taught us that if we do not forgive others, our Father in Heaven will not forgive us (see Matthew 18:33–35).

He said: “I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. . . . For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye?” (Matthew 5:44, 46). We must learn to feel toward others as Jesus did.

Developing the Virtue of Charity

- How can we become more charitable?

One way we can become charitable is by studying the life of Jesus Christ and keeping His commandments. We can study what He did in certain situations and do the same things when we are in the same kinds of situations.

Second, when we have uncharitable feelings, we can pray to have greater charity. Mormon urges us, “Pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love [charity], which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ” (Moroni 7:48).

Third, we can learn to love ourselves, which means that we understand our true worth as children of our Heavenly Father. The Savior taught that we must love others *as we love ourselves* (see Matthew 22:39). To love ourselves, we must respect and trust ourselves. This means that we must be obedient to the principles of the gospel. We must repent of any wrongdoings. We must forgive ourselves when we have repented. We will come to love ourselves better when we can feel the deep, comforting assurance that the Savior truly loves us.

Fourth, we can avoid thinking we are better than other people. We can have patience with their faults. Joseph Smith said, “The nearer we get to our heavenly Father, the more we are disposed to look with compassion on perishing souls; we feel that we want to take

For teachers: Under the heading “Developing the Virtue of Charity,” each of the first four paragraphs teaches one way we can become more charitable. If the setting allows for small group discussion, consider dividing class members or family members into groups of four. Assign one of the four paragraphs to each member of each group. Invite participants to study their assigned paragraphs individually. Ask them to think of examples, from the lives of people they know or people in the scriptures, that represent this way of becoming charitable. Then ask them to share their examples with each other in their groups.

them upon our shoulders, and cast their sins behind our backs” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 428–29).

In the Book of Mormon we read of Enos, a young man who wanted to know that his sins had been forgiven. He tells us:

“My soul hungered; and I kneeled down before my Maker, and I cried unto him in mighty prayer and supplication for mine own soul; and all the day long did I cry unto him; yea, and when the night came I did still raise my voice high that it reached the heavens.

“And there came a voice unto me, saying: Enos, thy sins are forgiven thee, and thou shalt be blessed” (Enos 1:4–5).

The Lord explained to Enos that because of his faith in Christ his sins had been forgiven. When Enos heard these words he no longer was concerned about himself. He knew the Lord loved him and would bless him. He began instead to feel concern for the welfare of his friends and relatives, the Nephites. He poured out his whole soul unto God for them. The Lord answered and said they would be blessed according to their faithfulness in keeping the commandments they had already been given. Enos’s love increased even further after these words, and he prayed with many long strugglings for the Lamanites, who were the enemies of the Nephites. The Lord granted his desires, and he spent the rest of his life trying to save the souls of the Nephites and the Lamanites. (See Enos 1:6–26.)

Enos was so grateful for the Lord’s love and forgiveness that he willingly spent the rest of his life helping others receive this same gift. Enos had become truly charitable. We too can do so. In fact, we must do so to inherit the place that has been prepared for us in our Father’s kingdom.

Additional Scriptures

- Colossians 3:12–14 (charity is the bond of perfectness)
- Alma 34:28–29 (our prayers are vain if we do not act charitably)
- 1 Corinthians 12:29–13:3 (definition of charity)
- D&C 121:45–46 (let us be full of charity toward all people)