

# Charity in the Community of Saints

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I recall participating in a workshop on campus about a year ago in which the invited presenter was attempting to establish the idea that all things are better understood if thoroughly studied and defined in detail. I raised my hand and said, “Some things are ruined by trying to explain them.” I feel that way to some degree today about my topic: “Charity in the Community of Saints.”

I know it can be sensed. I have sensed it, felt it, seen it many times, but whenever I try to say it, somehow it falls a bit short. Nevertheless, I invite you to “read between the lines” and see if you, like me, can sense and know it in another language recognized as familiar by our eternal selves.

A beautiful description of the love of God is given to us by Father Lehi. He writes:

*And it came to pass that I beheld a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy.*

*And it came to pass that I did go forth and partake of the fruit thereof; and I beheld that it was most sweet, above all that I ever before tasted. . . .*

*And as I partook of the fruit thereof it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy; wherefore, I began to be desirous that my family should partake of it also; for I knew that it was desirable above all other fruit. [1 Nephi 8:10–12]*

The fruit that was so delicious to Lehi that he deeply desired to share it with his family was the love of God, which he had personally felt. Once we experience its embracing power, we have an insatiable desire to experience it again and again. We want it always to be with us. Though some choose to deny it, most will make any sacrifice to gain it.

I will never forget the shock I felt the first time I became aware of someone in our own community who actually had called time and temperature to experience the comfort of hearing a human voice! They would often call in the middle of the night to relieve their loneliness. I thought, “How can this be in this community?”

Several years ago, while serving as bishop of my ward, I pulled out of my driveway very early on a dark, cold winter morning to go to the chapel. As I started down the street, I saw a familiar light on in the living room of an elderly neighbor. I knew he was suffering, as he did night after night, day after day, from a serious illness that caused excruciating pain in

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his aging legs, only receiving a small amount of relief by walking back and forth in his living room whenever the pain was unbearable.

While most of us slept, he walked. I wondered how he faced it and how his wife faced it. I knew of several others who suffered likewise from illnesses and despair that defied sleep. I drove through the ward that morning to see if other lights were on, or if they had somehow found a few extra moments of peace in sleep. I knew they needed the loving embrace of the Saints—I wondered if they felt it.

Dinah Maria Mulock Craik, a nineteenth-century English novelist, once captured this great human desire as she wrote:

*Oh, the comfort, the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person, having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words, but pouring them all right out, just as they are, chaff and grain together; certain that a faithful hand will take and sift them, keep what is worth keeping, and then with the breath of kindness, blow the rest away.*

This exists to its greatest degree in a community of Saints who know the Savior—not casually but intimately. It exists most completely in those who have studied his life and know him deeply. Too many of us know him by definition only. We know of him, but perhaps we do not sufficiently know him. Frederic W. Farrar wrote the following of Christ:

*All that the human frame can tolerate of suffering was to be heaped upon His shrinking body; every misery that cruel and crushing insult can inflict was to weigh heavy on His soul; and in this torment of body and agony of soul even the high and radiant serenity of His divine spirit was to suffer a short but terrible eclipse. Pain in its acutest sting, shame in its most overwhelming brutality, all the burden of . . . sin . . . this was what He must now face in all its most inexplicable accumulation. [Farrar, *The Life of Christ* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994), p. 575]*

How could such be born without the purest love for his brothers and sisters being at the root of his sacrifice?

Elder Bruce R. McConkie, in *The Mortal Messiah*, writes of Jesus' suffering in Gethsemane:

*What has been preserved for us is only a sliver from a great tree, only a few sentences of what was said, only a brief glimpse of what transpired. . . .*

*There is no language known to mortals that can tell what agony and suffering was his while in the Garden. [McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, vol. 4 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1981), pp. 124, 126]*

As King Benjamin wrote, “For behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people” (Mosiah 3:7).

I cannot fathom the love that served as his motivation.

The ultimate effect of the saving principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ is to change the heart! When this occurs, and it is usually a process that occurs through a series of significant spiritual experiences, we love more deeply and consistently. We love all that is of God more completely, and, thereby, we love his children and his work.

But we must seek this change of heart! We must desire it above all else!

To do so, we must struggle to give up the chains of the telestial world we live in. Often we must give them up more than once because they have a cunning way of returning to us even when we feel we are finally free of them! I believe this means we give up pride, winning, victory over others, and competition with each other—not victory and competition in the sense of personal enjoyment on a field of play or in the driveway but the destructive winning and dominating of brothers and sisters in which we seek to be above them. To free ourselves of these things, a stark change must

finally occur. It takes lots of hard work. It truly requires a fundamental change of heart.

Frederic W. Farrar, in a sermon preached in Trinity Church in Boston, November 1, 1885, exclaimed,

*Self is the all but universal idol; selfishness is for millions the sole law of existence. Men jostle each other, and struggle in the press, and trample savagely on fallen rivals, and show the poor spectacle of that perverted life which lives and dies only for itself. . . .*

*. . . Let us set our affection on things above, not on things on the earth; for, you see, a life spent in brushing clothes and washing crockery and sweeping floors—a life which the proud of earth would have treated as the dust under their feet—a life spent at the clerk's desk, a life spent in the narrow shop, a life spent in the laborer's hut—a life of poverty, a life of struggle, a life of obscurity and unsuccess—may yet be a life so ennobled by God's loving mercy, that for the sake of it a king might gladly yield his crown. [Sermons and Addresses Delivered in America (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1886), pp. 193–94, 200]*

C. S. Lewis said it powerfully and beautifully:

*Christ says "Give me All. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want You. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. . . . Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked—the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself: my own will shall become yours." [C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1984), p. 167]*

He will give us himself. Then what happens? What do we hope to see? I would like to

share with you a beautiful human experience that greatly helped me to answer that question.

Sharon Tennyson, a registered nurse, wrote the following during a sixteen-hour shift with a forty-year-old patient in very grave condition.

*The room was quiet. . . . curtains pulled to reduce sensory stimulation. . . . the environment is a tense peace, if that is possible. A little Basque priest comes in making his usual rounds. He inquires quietly about my patient's condition with real concern. I am touched as he walks to the bed rail, holds his hand—palm down—about twelve inches over this man's head, and begins to pray silently. Minutes later he makes a sweeping slow cross over the top part of my patient, and quietly fades out of the room.*

*I am aware of tears in my eyes. Why does this touch the heart and soul within me so? This little priest, looking to be in his sixties, salt and pepper hair, no taller than five foot three inches, walks around the hospital comforting the grieving, encouraging the sick and praying for the dying. And here he is today, praying over and loving a sleeping man who doesn't even know him or know he is there.*

*And this is his work in the world. He does it with great dignity and compassion. How many times are there those who are silently holding us in loving thought and prayer when it is completely unknown to us?*

*And my mind slowly comes back from its journey into timeless possibilities, to the bed of this beautiful man, and I take up where the little Basque priest left off, and am so touched and humbled by the possibility that we can enter into each other's lives in this silent way.*

[Gerald G. Jampolsky, *Teach Only Love* (New York: Bantam Books, 1983), pp. 73–74]

After reading this experience, I remembered a very late night when I knelt by the bedside of one of my own children who was having a very hard time with life. I prayed fervently for

him. I believe the love I felt for him that night was of the same origin as was the love Sharon Tennyson, the little Basque priest, and Lehi felt—it came from heavenly sources.

*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.*

*And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. . . .*

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

*Charity never faileth.* [1 Corinthians 13:1–2, 4, 8]

I do not want victory over anyone who is my sister or brother—which includes all. I want harmony, and I want to serve you—to give to you. I want those characteristics of charity in me so that I can give them to you.

I have come to believe that the gifts of the Spirit are most available to us when we reach heavenward to obtain them in order to give them away, in Christlike love, to our beloved brothers and sisters.

The Savior taught us this in a most poignant way. In *The Life of Christ*, we read of the apostles:

*Their feet must have been covered with dust from their walk along the hot and much frequented road from Bethany to Jerusalem, and under such circumstances they would have been refreshed for the festival by washing their feet after putting off their sandals. But to wash the feet was the work of slaves; and since no one had offered to perform the kindly office, Jesus Himself, in His eternal humility and self-denial, rose from His place at the meal to do the menial service which none of His disciples had offered to do for Him. . . . It is probable that in the utterness of self-abnegation, He entirely stripped His upper limbs. . . . Then pouring water into the*

*large copper basin with which an Oriental house is always provided, He began without a word to wash His disciples feet, and wipe them dry with the towel which served Him as a girdle.* [Farrar, *Life of Christ*, p. 557]

It has always amazed me that this Man of Humility, who was the Creator of the Earth and the Savior of Mankind, *even chose to wash the feet of Judas!* Judas was the traitor himself, the betrayer of the Lord. He had felt the touch of those kind and gentle hands. He had seen that sacred head bent over his feet. And while the Savior washed them, he knew Judas' betraying heart would yet send him to Calvary's hill!

The apostles rightfully called Christ the Master and Lord—for so he was. Yet he washed their feet.

It was a kind and gracious act, and such ought to be the guiding principle in all our dealings with each other. Humility requires that we set ourselves aside for a bit to make place for the needs of others.

As this remarkable human, yet sacred drama came to an end, Jesus taught his apostles a lesson he knew would be recorded for you and me to read and hopefully embrace.

*Little children, yet a little while I am with you. . . . Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say unto you.*

*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 13:33–35]

Love was now the test and condition of discipleship—not the conditional love of this telectual world but the pure, true, unfeigned love exemplified by Christ as being without condition. It was known to be without condition because he offered it to all sinners, even Judas.

I have spent the majority of my professional life working with people who have troubled hearts and lives. I have known many who grew up as children in troubled families. They generally did not feel love. They felt alone. As I have worked with so many troubled spirits, I find that they are often painfully lonely. Aloneness is one of the great maladies of our day. Even active Latter-day Saints, busily working in the midst of so many others, at times report being lonely—feeling an absence of love.

We must correct that through hard work—making sacrifices to notice and to reach out to others and to love one another, as he commanded us to do.

I have always enjoyed *The Magic of Being in Touch* by Smiley Blanton, M.D.:

*As a psychiatrist, I have good reason to know how often human problems are caused by the simple failure of people to make contact with other people. . . . Love is the climate in which all living things flourish and sometimes a single touch can evoke the atmosphere. . . . A mother ruffles her child's hair lightly . . . a husband, helping his wife on with her coat, rests his hands for a moment on her shoulders—and this says, "I love you" as clearly as if he had written the words in letters of fire. I have always had a warm feeling for the father of the prodigal son in the Bible parable. When the prodigal son finally came home, the father did not wait in the door with a prim word of welcome and reluctant handshake. He "ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him."*

*Marta Korwin-Rhodes, a concert pianist, was in Warsaw when that city was besieged by the Nazis in World War II. She volunteered to work as a nurse in a hospital, caring for the wounded.*

*"Late one night," she wrote, "going through the wards, I noticed a soldier, whose face was buried in a pillow. In his agony, he was sobbing and moaning into the pillow so that he would disturb no one. How could I help him? I looked at my hands. If I could transmit vibrations in harmony through the piano, why could I not transmit harmony directly*

*without an instrument? When I took the boy's head in my hands, he grabbed them with such force I thought his nails would be embedded in my flesh. I prayed that the harmony of the world would come to alleviate his pain. His sobs quieted. Then his hands released their grip, and he was asleep.*

*"The magic of being in touch. It can express love and ease pain and can give mankind its humanity."*

Notice that in all these instances there is a setting aside of oneself. Though this is crucial in all of our human relationships, I hope we particularly remember it in our families where lives may be nurtured and spiritually fed in dramatic ways. President David O. McKay once wrote:

*Homes are made permanent through love. Oh, then, let love abound! If you feel that you have not the love of your children, live to get it. Though you neglect some of the cattle, though you fall short in some material matters, study and work and pray to hold your children's love. [Clare Middlemiss, comp., *Man May Know for Himself: Teachings of President David O. McKay* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1969), p. 227]*

One of the most beautiful descriptions of the setting aside of self—a defining characteristic of charity in the community of Saints—is found in the story of Macarius, the hermit.

*St. Macarius, the hermit, lived in the desert in a little community of solitaries. One day there was brought to him that which, in the hot desert, is the most tempting and exquisite of all luxuries—a bunch of fresh purple grapes, with the bloom and mist of their delicious ripeness upon them. Macarius hated the thought of taking them himself he preferred that another should enjoy the boon, and handed it to one of the brothers; but the same motive was strong in him, and he gave it to another. But again this other preferred the enjoyment of a companion to his own; and so, in the absolute*

*unselfishness of that little community, the untouched, tempting grapes, which would have been so cool, so refreshing in the burning day, were handed from one to another, none wishing to keep what would be pleasant to his fellow, till at last they were handed back to Macarius again. Unselfishness, you see, had become as completely the law of that little brotherhood as selfishness is the law of the common world. Oh, how infinitely lovelier is the spectacle presented by these saints of God, and their love for one another, than is daily presented in this hard, modern life. [Farrar, Sermons and Addresses, p. 194]*

The love of Christ knew no boundaries and had no conditions. It was and is offered to any and all who seek to experience its soothing, healing effects.

In October of 1990 our neighbor's daughter was involved in an automobile accident returning home from college. I was the bishop at the time and received a phone call about midnight from Kim's father, Ralph Johnson, asking if I could go to the LDS Hospital in Salt Lake City and be with her because they were stranded in California, where they had driven that weekend, unable to get a flight back to Salt Lake City until the next morning. Brother and Sister Johnson wanted someone to be with their daughter, whose condition was critical. My wife, Sherri, and I, and my first counselor, Dick Beeson, traveled to the hospital. Kim was in a coma. Her uncle and boyfriend were already present. All during the night we prayed, waited, hoped, and cried. Sometime during the night, feeling very bad, I decided to walk down to the area where Kim lay unconscious. It must have been three or four a.m. Much to my surprise I found my wife, Sherri, sitting by Kim, talking to her and stroking her arm softly. I said something to Sherri about coming back to the waiting room with me, to which she responded, "In a while. Someone who knows her and loves her should be with her. This is

where Ralph and Nancy would be if they were here. She needs a mom. I will stay with her."

I do not know if Kim knew of my wife's care, but I hope she felt it even if she could not see it. Sherri gave Kim pure love unfeigned in the middle of that night while she lay dying. I learned that night that love is most pure when there is no consideration of a response from the person receiving it.

That is the pure love we should offer to each other in large quantities. Everyone loves to be loved. It feels good. I believe we respond to it as we do because it was so much a part of our premortal lives—it must have filled the celestial courts on high as we lived in the presence of our heavenly parents. As we experience such love here, it carries with it some soft and subtle memories of the pure love we basked in there in our heavenly home.

There is always the question of how these correct principles related to Christlike love are actually to become a part of our lives in a day-to-day fashion. I have thought about that a great deal because if we cannot get from principle to practice, then our daily lives remain unaffected. I once fashioned a concept called "The Blue Line" that I would like to share with you. The idea is that we draw a blue line around any group of individuals with whom we choose to work—a family, a ward, a class we teach, a priesthood quorum, a Relief Society, a Scout troop, a social group—literally any group. For example, you take a written list of students in your Primary class of five-year-olds and draw a blue line around it. The blue line becomes a symbol. What happens when a child crosses the blue line and enters your class? What happens when a person crosses the blue line and enters your ward? We then raise the question, What do we offer to anyone who crosses the blue line and enters our group? What do they come seeking? What will we give to all who join us? I always have felt that we have certain basic needs that seem to be eternally a part of us—the need to be loved, to feel

important, to feel valuable, to feel worthwhile, to feel significant, to mention a few. As a person crosses the blue line to enter your Relief Society, for example, you make a commitment to help them in every way to feel loved, significant, worthwhile, important. You make plans and decisions to do all you can to help all who have crossed the blue line and entered your group to experience those vital feelings of significance, worth, value, importance, and love. It will bring a sense of spiritual aliveness to all with whom you work and serve.

At the conclusion of the movie *The Chosen*, patterned after the book by Chaim Potok, we hear the following story:

*There is a story in the Talmud about a king who had a son who had gone astray from his father. The son was told, "Return to your father." The son said, "I cannot."*

*Then his father sent a messenger to say, "Return as far as you can and I will come to you the rest of the way."*

Oh, how I wish we would not wait for each other to come asking for love, for the nourishment of charity! Go to each other! Seek to love one another!

If such is the heart of the community of the Saints, the world will throng to us to share in it with us.

Alma teaches us:

*Let your hearts be full, drawn out in prayer unto him continually for your welfare, and also for the welfare of those who are around you.*

*And now behold, my beloved brethren, I say unto you, do not suppose that this is all; for after ye have done all these things, if ye turn away the needy, and the naked, and visit not the sick and afflicted, and impart of your substance, if ye have, to those who stand in need—I say unto you, if ye do not any of these things, behold, your prayer is vain, and availeth you nothing. [Alma 34:27–28]*

Sometimes I fear we are so well organized to assist and help that we miss many marvelous opportunities to spontaneously bless the lives of many around us through completely voluntary acts of service.

Please don't forget the quiet and unnoticed. Also, don't forget the strong ones. They seem not to need your embrace—but, they do! Some carry silent, heavy burdens, and they are people, too. Your simple inquiry as to their welfare may make the difference for them in being able to continue to carry their heavy responsibilities. The strong need to be loved and cared for as do those who struggle and strain. The needs of one may simply be more obvious than those of the others. We all need the touch of the Savior's hand.

Though the peoples of the earth are gladly embracing the true doctrine of the restored gospel in our day, do you know what will quicken their pace even to a run? The pure love of Christ in the hearts of the people. Do you know what will get them to stay in and among the community of Saints? The pure love of Christ in the hearts of the people.

I was a seventeen-year-old convert to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Coronado, California, attending a small branch of the Church with about eighty members. I remember that I used to go, even midweek, and stand on the street outside the Masonic Lodge where our small group met on Sunday and wish I could be inside with those eighty Saints who loved me with a type of love I had never before experienced in my entire life. I can feel it now as I speak to you about it. It is his love that I felt. I am also grateful that over the time of my Church membership, there have been some who have loved me enough to help me change my life and improve it. It has required that their love of me take a tough front at times, but it has been love that helped me to grow and change in important ways. Sometimes love has to be tough to help us

pursue important life changes. I am grateful to those who loved me that much.

Moroni taught:

*Wherefore, my beloved brethren, 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.* [Moroni 7:48]

Love, the pure love of Christ, is called charity. It is the only thing I know of that seems to increase in quantity as we offer it, unto the filling of all who seek to drink at its well. Let's listen more, try to understand each other a little more, hold hands more, put ourselves second a little more, comfort more, lend a few more helping hands when it might be inconvenient, just care more.

So, what am I hoping for? I would like to hear us say the words *I love you* more. I would like to see more of us in family home evenings where it is less of a class but a place where we sit with our arms around each other and talk

of the Savior's gospel, expressing love for one another. I hope for more parents taking walks with their children hand in hand; more games where we laugh and play together because we like each other; more gratitude expressed in abundant love for one another; more love letters; more of us kneeling together in prayer, expressing our love for our Heavenly Father and for each other; less judgment, and more understanding ears for one another; more love expressed that is heavenly rather than dutiful. Love really has a hard time being based in duty! I look for more acceptance and understanding of those who are in their worst moments of life—so that they can reach out for help rather than fearing to allow anyone to know of their personal dilemmas. I pray for fear to subside and for love to grow in our relationships with one another.

Charity in the community of the Saints—may it be in the hearts of who we are as his servants, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.