

# *The Most Important Three Things in the World*

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I wish to thank President Samuelson, Academic Vice President Tanner, and Advancement Vice President Worthen for the opportunity to speak today. I am grateful for these devotionals and the occasion they give us to explore what it means to be a community of faith as well as a community of reason. I want to express my gratitude for the beautiful music and to Megan Grant and Suzanne Disparte for their prayers. They are two of my research assistants who prop me up on a daily basis; so it is entirely fitting that they do the same thing here. I want to also acknowledge my father and stepmother; my wife, Deirdre; and my three children, Elliot, Sophelia, and Ella. They are missing school to be here, so I know I have a grateful audience of at least three.

As I prepared to speak with you today, I actually worked through three different topics, each more personal than the last, and I hope you will forgive me as I speak from the heart about some aspects of my own journey of faith.

I traveled in my mind's eye back to my student days. At Oxford University I attended a series of lectures in which a famous and fashionable professor asserted confidently that the study of ancient Greek philosophy was one of the three best things in life. With a sly smile

and an arched eyebrow, he did not tell us out loud what he thought the other two were.

But his assertion left me wondering: What are the most important three things in the world? Later, during my personal scripture study, I searched the Topical Guide for inspiration and was led to Paul's famous formulation in 1 Corinthians:

*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. . . .*

*And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.<sup>1</sup>*

At the very end of the Book of Mormon, after completing his abridgement of the Jaredite record, the prophet Moroni is surprised to find that he is not dead yet.<sup>2</sup> Fortunately, he catches a second wind and recounts a few of his father's teachings,

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including Mormon’s powerful discourse on faith, hope, and charity.<sup>3</sup> And then, in Moroni 10, the last chapter of the Book of Mormon, Moroni returns to this theme as he offers his final exhortations. (By my count, in that chapter alone he uses the words *exhortation* or *exhort* nine times.) Moroni says:

*And I would exhort you, my beloved brethren, that ye remember that every good gift cometh of Christ. . . .*

*Wherefore, there must be faith; and if there must be faith there must also be hope; and if there must be hope there must also be charity.*

*And except ye have charity ye can in nowise be saved in the kingdom of God; neither can ye be saved in the kingdom of God if ye have not faith; neither can ye if ye have no hope.<sup>4</sup>*

Today I would like to spend our time together talking about faith, hope, and charity.

These are not simply three good things on a list. In a certain sense, they are the most important three things in the world. They are the foundational Christian virtues. Each is a trait of character to be cultivated and developed. Each is a set of attitudes and beliefs to guide thought and action. Each is a choice. Each is a gift from God.

Faith, hope, and charity may be likened to the three legs of a stool. As a boy visiting my grandmother’s farm, I was impressed with the three-legged stool used for milking cows. Just as the stool’s three legs enabled it to rest firmly on uneven ground, if we are grounded in faith, hope, and charity, we too will be on solid footing, even when the ground beneath us is rough or bumpy. Just as a one- or two-legged stool will teeter precariously, we too will be vulnerable to toppling over if we neglect any of these three virtues.

In my study of this topic, I’ve noticed several things. First, faith, hope, and charity are mutually reinforcing. An increase in one tends to result in an increase in the others.

If we are feeling weak with respect to one, we can gather strength by focusing on the other two.

There is also a temporal dimension to the relationship. Faith is rooted in the past—in Christ’s death and resurrection and in His Atonement for our sins. Hope is focused on the future—in the promise that through Christ’s Atonement and by the covenants we make and keep, we can return to the presence of our Father in Heaven. And charity is enacted in the present—because it is only here and now that we can really love.

There is also a dimension of progression and culmination: faith and hope lead to charity, and it is charity—Christ’s love for us—that never fails.<sup>5</sup> If we desire to develop and be endowed with this Christlike love, it will be by traveling the road of faith and hope.

## I. Faith

First, a few words about faith.

As a freshman at Georgetown University, I took a required course, *The Problem of God*, from a wonderful professor, Dr. John F. Haught. This Catholic theologian became one of my most influential teachers and mentors.

One day toward the end of fall semester, Dr. Haught introduced theologian Paul Ricoeur’s concept of the three stages of religious faith.<sup>6</sup>

The first stage, childlike faith, may be likened to the clear, unimpeded view that one enjoys standing atop a tall mountain.<sup>7</sup> As children, our faith is simple and uncritical, and we can see clearly in every direction. There is something quite beautiful about this stage of faith. To me it is exemplified by hearing a chorus of Primary children sing “I Know My Father Lives.”<sup>8</sup>

The second stage Ricoeur calls the desert of criticism. At some point, often during adolescence, we descend from the mountain of childlike faith and enter the critical world. We might label this world “high school” or, better yet, “college.” Here we find that others do not

share our faith. In fact, some openly disparage what we hold dear. We learn that the very idea of faith is thought by many to be childish or delusional. We may become skeptical, perhaps even cynical.

The desert of criticism is akin to being in the midst of a blinding sandstorm, where you are forced to lean into the wind and take one step at a time without a clear view of where you are going. Walking by faith becomes difficult. Some of our former beliefs cannot survive the desert of criticism.

Ricoeur did not malign the desert of criticism, for some childish beliefs are incorrect and should be abandoned. As the Apostle Paul says in his discourse on faith, hope, and charity, "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 man, I put away childish things."<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, it is only in coming down from the mountain that we are able to enter into the world and engage others who are different from us. To a great extent this is where life is lived and where we can make a difference in the world. Some people never leave the desert of criticism, and in time the memory of their childlike faith may dim. After prolonged exposure to the desert of criticism, some even lose their faith altogether. Ricoeur maintained that once one has entered the desert of criticism, it is not possible to return to the mountain of childlike faith. It is a little like leaving Eden. Something has been lost; life and faith can never be quite so simple again.<sup>10</sup>

But he held out the possibility of a third stage of religious faith. On the other side of the desert of criticism lies another mountain, not as tall as the mountain of childlike faith, with views that are not quite as clear and unobstructed. But we can, as Dr. Haught explained it, remove ourselves periodically from the desert of criticism and ascend this somewhat less majestic mountain. Ricoeur calls this possibility of a second faith "postcritical" naïveté or a "second naïveté."<sup>11</sup>

Here the truths and realities of our childlike faith can be reaffirmed or revised. Although the view is not completely unimpeded, and the storms of the desert of criticism remain in view, and some of our childish beliefs may be left behind, we can emerge from the storm and reaffirm our faith. Our faith will not be as simple as it once was, but it need not be lost. In fact, I believe our faith may become more powerful than before, for it will have weathered and survived the assaults of the desert of criticism.

To me, postcritical naïveté is a state in which both our hearts and our minds are open and we remain willing to experience childlike spiritual wonder; it is a place where we remain open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. As Paul puts it, "Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men."<sup>12</sup>

My father told me about an experience he had when he was roughly the age of most of you. As a young adult he was, in a sense, in the desert of criticism and found himself questioning his faith and the Church. One day he took out a pad of paper and made a list of his criticisms and doubts. He put the list in a drawer and forgot about it. Years later he found it again, and he was surprised that nearly every concern had been answered in his mind and in his heart. He reflected upon how different his life, and the lives of his posterity, would have been if he had followed his questions and concerns out of the Church.

One of my favorite stories that illustrates what faith and trust mean is the account of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. You recall the story. King Nebuchadnezzar commanded all his subjects to worship a golden image, and these three young men boldly refused. They were condemned to death by fire. The furnace was heated to seven times its normal strength and was so hot that the guards around it were consumed by the flames. As the three young men walked out of the fiery furnace, not a hair

of their heads was singed, their coats were not burned, and they didn't even smell like smoke.<sup>13</sup> That's impressive.

But to me there is another aspect to the story that is even more impressive. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego addressed King Nebuchadnezzar before being thrown into the fire, they declared:

*Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.*

*But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.*<sup>14</sup>

The words that impress me are “but if not.” I understand Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego to be saying that even if God, for His own reasons, does not intervene to save them, they will not question or doubt His power and goodness. Their trust in God is unequivocal.<sup>15</sup>

Trust like that is not easy. Faith is not the power to bend God's will to ours, but rather the power to align our will with that of Heavenly Father.

God is mighty to save, but sometimes He does not intervene in the affairs of men. He allows mind-boggling evil and suffering in the world. He allows us to hurt each other in unimaginable ways. To me, more impressive than the fact that God could save Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego was that they could trust God, whatever the physical outcome of their being thrown into the fire.<sup>16</sup>

In my experience, sometimes God gives us direction that is unmistakable and clear. But the answers to our prayers do not always come in the time frame and way we expect.

Perhaps you will indulge me another personal story. I had the dream of becoming a law professor even before I went to law school. In an abundance of caution, I applied to 10 schools and found myself in a fortunate situation, like you have, with a number of good choices.

I knew where I wanted to attend, but I decided to ask Heavenly Father. I prayed and pondered without receiving an answer. As the days turned to weeks, I'm sorry to say I grew impatient, annoyed, and perhaps even angry. “If I'm willing to do your will,” I complained, “you could at least have the common courtesy to tell me what your will is.”

After weeks had passed, I decided to make a more serious attempt. I climbed on my bicycle and rode to a quiet place beside a small river a few miles out of town. I spent the day on my knees with my scriptures and a notebook. Finally, as the shadows grew long, I gave up in frustration. I was pounding the pedals on my bicycle as I rode home. Gradually I calmed, and my cadence slowed. A thought entered my mind, at first faint, and then increasingly distinct: “Honor your priesthood and remember your covenants.” I repeated this in my mind with the revolution of the bicycle pedals: “Honor your priesthood, remember your covenants. Honor your priesthood, remember your covenants.”

I stopped my bike, looked up to heaven, and exclaimed, perhaps audibly, “You don't care where I go to law school! You want me to honor my priesthood and keep my covenants.” As I spoke these words, I was flooded with the classic confirmation of the Holy Spirit, a combination of a shiver down my spine and a burning in my chest that was so strong I could hardly stand it.

So I went to the law school of my choice. During my years there, when I was tempted to think too much of myself or to be too caught up in the cares and preoccupations with which I was surrounded, I thought often, “Brett, honor your priesthood and remember your covenants.” It was precisely the message I needed to keep me on track during those three years of law school. My prayers had been answered in a deeply meaningful—but entirely unexpected—way.

I have had the opposite experience as well, in which I was directed to a particular place. On those occasions, too, the answer was sometimes quite different than I expected.

## II. Hope

A few words about hope. Hope is not just a positive attitude, a sunny disposition, or looking on the bright side of life. Hope is rooted in Jesus Christ and the prospect of being with Him back in the presence of God. Deep down, it is a surrender and a trust in God and His promises—that He, and they, are real. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego had hope, but not just that they would survive the fiery furnace. They also had confidence in God’s plan.

Hope is neither ethereal nor wispy; it is an anchor for the soul. Hope is focused on the future and gives us the disciple’s perspective that the current state of affairs will not last. Hope is not simply the truism “This too shall pass,” helpful though that truism is.<sup>17</sup> Rather, hope is a quiet confidence about what shall come to pass—that Christ is mighty to save and that His grace is sufficient for us.

Perhaps the reason I am so drawn to the concepts of faith, hope, and charity is that even though I work hard and am reasonably diligent, sometimes I get discouraged or frustrated with my own limitations. For me there is comfort in the concept of hope, understood as a quiet confidence and belief that my best will be good enough and that Jesus Christ is there to carry me the rest of the way.

Maybe because I am a lawyer, one of my favorite descriptions of the Savior is that He is our Advocate. Both John and Mormon describe Jesus Christ as our Advocate with the Father.<sup>18</sup> And in the Doctrine and Covenants we read:

*Listen to him who is the advocate with the Father, who is pleading your cause before him—*

*Saying: Father, behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin, in whom thou wast well pleased. . . .*

*Wherefore, Father, spare these my brethren that believe on my name, that they may come unto me and have everlasting life.*<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps less familiar is the description of Satan, who is not our advocate but is rather our accuser. Revelations 12:10 says:

*And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.*

Isn’t this description of Satan interesting? He accuses us before God both night and day. Lucifer is relentless in his desire to accuse and convict us before God.<sup>20</sup>

In our own lives we often hear voices that tell us that we are not good enough and that we are unworthy or even unredeemable. Sometimes, and most dangerously, these voices come from within our own heads and hearts. I believe that these voices, external and internal, are often tools and messages of the adversary. If he can convince us that we are failures, or if he can persuade us that we are good for nothing, unloved, or unlovable, then he is succeeding in accomplishing his work and his glory, to bring to pass the death and eternal damnation of mankind.<sup>21</sup>

Which voice will we heed—that of the Savior, whose message is that even when we stray or fail, His hand is outstretched still,<sup>22</sup> or that of Satan, whose aim is to make us miserable like unto himself?<sup>23</sup>

Not only is the Savior our Advocate with the Father, pleading *for us*, but Jesus also pleads *with us* to keep His commandments so that we may enjoy the complete blessings of His Atonement:

*Hearken, O ye people of my church, to whom the kingdom has been given; hearken ye and give ear. . . .*

*Listen to him who is the advocate with the Father, who is pleading your cause before him. . . .*

*Hearken, O ye people of my church, and ye elders listen together, and hear my voice while it is called today, and harden not your hearts.*<sup>24</sup>

For example, the passage in D&C 45 we just read, about Christ being our Advocate pleading *for us*, is bookended by Jesus pleading *with us* to hearken, give ear, hear His voice, and harden not our hearts.<sup>25</sup>

### III. Charity

Finally, charity. The importance of charity can scarcely be overstated. The Apostle Paul calls charity the greatest of all things<sup>26</sup> and says that without it we are nothing.<sup>27</sup> Mormon urges us to “cleave unto charity,”<sup>28</sup> and the Doctrine and Covenants instructs us to clothe ourselves in it.<sup>29</sup> Paul mentions charity 75 times and calls it “the end of the commandment,”<sup>30</sup> and John mentions it 30 times.<sup>31</sup> Amulek puts it starkly: “If ye do not remember to be charitable, ye are as dross, which the refiners do cast out, (it being of no worth) and is trodden under foot of men.”<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps picking up on the concept of the three degrees of glory, I like to think of three degrees of charity. The first involves how we listen, the second how we give, and the third how we love.

#### *Charity in Listening*

The first degree of charity involves the way we listen to and seek to understand others. Charity in this sense is often associated with being fair-minded and giving others the benefit of the doubt.<sup>33</sup>

This sense of charity is captured in *The Oxford English Dictionary's* definition of *charitable* as “inclined to think no evil of others, to put the most favourable construction on their actions.”<sup>34</sup> This definition echoes Paul, who declares that charity “thinketh no evil.”<sup>35</sup>

The philosopher Eugene Garver has written thoughtfully about what it means to listen and understand with charity:

*Discourse is always incomplete and always requires interpretation, filling in missing premises, understanding ambiguities, etc. Our rational reconstructions depend on charity because we are inevitably making choices in understanding another.*<sup>36</sup>

In striving to become charitable listeners, we may gain an increased appreciation for Mormon’s observation that an essential component of charity is being “meek and lowly in heart.”<sup>37</sup> It takes a certain measure of humility to strive to understand others rather than to construe them in a way that serves our purposes.

Consider Mormon’s description of charity while focusing specifically on seeking to become a charitable listener:

*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.*<sup>38</sup>

This is an impressive road map of how we should listen to one another.

#### *Charity in Giving*

The second degree of charity involves the way we give to and seek to serve others. Charity in this sense is often associated with almsgiving, which can easily lead to a distorted understanding of what charity really means. The British have a phrase, “as cold as charity,” which they use to describe the heart and attitude of charity given in a way that is condescending or self-righteous.

When we act with genuine charity, we seek to lift others up or to give them a boost, perhaps while we stay below.<sup>39</sup>

*Charity in Loving*

The third degree of charity involves the way we care for and love others. Charity in this sense is celestial.

Perhaps the most moving definition of charity is found in Moroni. The prophet Mormon declared, “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.”<sup>40</sup>

There seems to be a progression from the easier to the more difficult among the three degrees of charity. We cannot hope to have genuine charity if we are not charitable as listeners and givers. Not surprisingly, cultivating the “pure love of Christ” involves taking steps. We do not simply develop such love instantly; for most of us, it will be a lifelong process. Ultimately, it is a gift of God.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, I stand with Paul in declaring the centrality of faith, hope, and charity. In saying this, I am constrained to acknowledge that we often find most appealing those ideals that we recognize we fall short of ourselves. This is certainly true in this case with me.

Nevertheless, I do have faith. God is our Father and we are His children, with all that implies. I pray that the wind and dust in the desert of criticism will not blind us to the truths of the gospel and that we may seek and find our own postcritical naïveté—a place where we can sing with wholehearted childlike amazement (as we have this morning):

*Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee,  
How great thou art! How great thou art!*<sup>41</sup>

I testify that Jesus Christ is the Savior and Redeemer of the world, and of you and even of me, and that He is mighty to save!<sup>42</sup>

This faith gives me hope that Christ’s Atonement is sufficient for us—for you and for me. I have hope that through the principles

and ordinances of the gospel and by making and keeping covenants, we will be saved as “children of God: and if children, then heirs; . . . joint-heirs with Christ.”<sup>43</sup> I am grateful that our Savior is our Advocate with the Father, pleading *for* us, and also pleading *with* us, to come unto Him.

I testify that charity—Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ’s pure love for us—is real. I pray that we may be blessed with a more abundant measure of charity in accordance with the work of our hands and the desires of our hearts.

Finally, I am grateful that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”<sup>44</sup> In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

**Notes**

1. 1 Corinthians 13:1–2, 13.
2. See Moroni 1:4.
3. See Moroni 7:20–48 (verses 20–39 discuss faith, 40–43 hope, and 44–48 charity).
4. Moroni 10:18, 20–21.
5. See 1 Corinthians 13:8.
6. Dr. Haught’s discussion was an adaption of Paul Ricoeur’s thought. See Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1967), 347–57; see also John F. Haught, *The Cosmic Adventure: Science, Religion and the Quest for Purpose* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 94–95.
7. Ricoeur calls this “primitive naïveté” or a “precritical form of immediate belief” (*Symbolism of Evil*, 351–52).
8. *Songbook*, 5.
9. 1 Corinthians 13:11.
10. See *Symbolism of Evil*, 351.
11. *Symbolism of Evil*, 352.
12. 1 Corinthians 14:20.
13. See Daniel 3.
14. Daniel 3:17–18; emphasis added.
15. I express my gratitude to Brent Bowles for helping me appreciate this aspect of this

story. See Dennis E. Simmons, “But If Not . . .,” *Ensign*, May 2004, 73–75.

16. Many years ago I heard a story about a pioneer couple, and it deeply impressed me. They had joined the Church and, with their infant child, made the difficult trek to Utah. Their journey was treacherous, and along the way their only child died. Husband and wife were heartbroken, and neither would ever be the same again. But their responses to this tragedy were very different. The husband became hard, bitter, and angry with God and the Church, and he developed a heart of stone. His wife, on the other hand, became more empathetic to the suffering of others and developed a deep spirituality and trust in Heavenly Father. Her heart became tender and soft.

Perhaps this story made such an impression on me because I recognized in myself the capacity to respond to life in both of these ways. When confronted with disappointment or difficulty, I can become withdrawn and distant, I can turn inward, and I can feel my heart harden. But I have also taken the other road—perhaps the road less traveled—in which I respond with a softening of my heart. To me, this story represents the very different reactions we can have to the hard realities of life: we can remain in the desert of criticism, or we can seek a deeper faith—our own postcritical naïveté.

17. In an address to the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society in 1859, Abraham Lincoln observed, “It is said an Eastern monarch once charged his wise men to invent him a sentence, to be ever in view, and which should be true and appropriate in all times and situations. They presented him the words: ‘*And this, too, shall pass away.*’ How much it expresses! How chastening in the hour of pride!—how consoling in the depths of affliction!” (Address before the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 30 September 1859; in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler [New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1953], 3:481–82).

18. See 1 John 2:1–2 and Moroni 7:28.

19. D&C 45:3–5

20. I express gratitude to Louis Pope for drawing my attention to the distinction between Jesus Christ the Advocate and Lucifer the accuser.

21. Compare Moses 1:39 with Moses 4:3–4.

22. See 2 Nephi 1:14–15 and Jacob 6:5.

23. See 2 Nephi 2:27.

24. D&C 45:1, 3, 6.

25. D&C 45:1 begins, “Hearken, O ye people of my church, to whom the kingdom has been given; hearken ye and give ear to him who laid the foundation of the earth.” And in verse six, the verse following the passage about Jesus pleading our cause, Christ again pleads with us: “Hearken, O ye people of my church, and ye elders listen together, and hear my voice while it is called today, and harden not your hearts.” We see something similar in Moroni’s account of his father Mormon’s words, in which Mormon pleads with us to “cleave unto every good thing” (Moroni 7:28) and teaches that Christ has said, “Repent all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, and have faith in me, that ye may be saved” (Moroni 7:34). The passage in 1 John describing Jesus as our Advocate with the Father is also followed with an admonition to keep the commandments (see 1 John 2:3–5).

26. See 1 Corinthians 13:13; see also Moroni 7:46.

27. See 1 Corinthians 13:2; see also Moroni 7:46.

28. Moroni 7:46.

29. See D&C 88:125.

30. 1 Timothy 1:5.

31. See, for example, 1 John 4:8; see also Ether 12:34.

32. Alma 34:29.

33. When listening with charity, we are not primarily concerned with ourselves and planning our response, but with seeking genuinely to understand. Being a generous listener reduces the distance between oneself and others.



34. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “charitable.” A related definition of *charity* in *The Oxford English Dictionary* is “A disposition to judge leniently and hopefully of the character, aims, and destinies of others, to make allowance for their apparent faults and shortcomings; large-heartedness. (But often it amounts barely to fair-mindedness towards people disapproved of or disliked, this being appraised as a magnanimous virtue.)” This sense is summed up as “fairness; equity” (s.v. “charity”). *Cruden’s Dictionary of Bible Terms* includes this dimension of charity in its expansive definition of the term. “A person endued [with charity] does not interpret doubtful things to the worst sense, but the best; is sorry for the sins of others, but rejoices when any one does well, and is apt to bear with their failings and infirmities” (ed. Alexander Cruden [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House: 1958], s.v. “charity”).

35. 1 Corinthians 13:5.

36. Eugene Garver, “Why Should Anybody Listen? The Rhetoric of Religious Argument in Democracy,” *Wake Forest Law Review* 36, no. 2 (2001): 378. Garver continues, “Like friendship, being trustworthy involves complicated relations between speaker and hearer” (“Why Should Anybody Listen?” 378). Thus, listening with charity involves not just the skillful use of techniques; rather it reflects a certain type of disposition or character. Indeed, the techniques may vary. For example, sometimes charity requires looking beyond the words spoken, while sometimes it requires taking words at face value. But the underlying attitude of the charitable listener will remain constant. Listening with charity will always involve generosity, trust, good faith, and being large-hearted and fair-minded.

37. Moroni 7:44.

38. Moroni 7:45.

39. It may be that because the modern ear associates the word *charity* with *almsgiving*, and because such giving often magnifies rather than reduces the differences between ourselves and others, that most modern translations of the New Testament render the Greek word *agape* as *love* rather than *charity* in order to avoid the minimalist, even negative, associations of *charity*. *The Encyclopedia Americana* notes, however, that “in the Middle Ages the Latin word *caritas*, from which charity is derived, was filled with the richest meanings of self-denial and self-sacrifice for the sake of others. It was only in the post-Reformation period that charity became identified with almsgiving. To the Reformers, giving alms was a pretended means of winning merit, and this led to the rejection of ‘charity’ in Biblical texts and hence in general religious usage among Protestants.” Nevertheless, *The Encyclopedia Americana* continues, “the word is too rich in meaning to be abandoned: pure charity is the noblest of virtues” (International edition, s.v. “charity”).

40. Moroni 7:47. The LDS Bible Dictionary defines *charity* as “the highest, noblest, strongest kind of love, not merely affection; the pure love of Christ” (s.v. “charity,” 632). To his disciples, Jesus said, “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).

41. “How Great Thou Art,” *Hymns*, 1985, no. 86.

42. See 2 Nephi 31:19–20.

43. Romans 8:16–17.

44. John 3:16.