

the Father and the Son (see 1 Nephi 11). Holding fast to the iron rod builds faith in Christ and his work.

Nourish the seed

The prophet Alma, living five hundred years after Lehi, was strongly impacted by Lehi's vision of the tree of life. Alma, however, changes the imagery in an interesting way. He likens the word of God to a seed which is planted in the heart and then nourished. He states that if people will no more than desire to believe in Christ, the seed will sprout and grow, and they will feel a swelling inside as the seed enlarges the soul. The desire to believe, coupled with obedience, eventually turns to faith in Jesus Christ.

Alma states that continued nourishment will cause the seed to grow into the tree of life with fruit that is exceedingly white, sweet, and pure—"a tree springing up unto everlasting life" (Alma 32:41; see also 32:26-42). In Alma's example, the tree of life grows within each person to change his or her heart and soul. Holding fast to the iron rod in Lehi's dream is the equivalent.

Alma's explanation of the tree growing within and changing people's hearts gives light to an earlier set of questions that he asked Church members. The questions were: "Have ye

spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?" (Alma 5:14). Changes in the heart and soul occur as a result of planting and nourishing the seed. Scripture study, prayer, obedience, and service are key elements in building faith in Christ.

President Benson, in the April 1986 general conference, expressed these thoughts: "However diligent we may be in other areas, certain blessings are to be found only in the scriptures, only in coming to the word of the Lord and holding fast to it as we make our way through the mists of darkness to the tree of life."³ Brothers and sisters, I testify that President Benson is the Lord's prophet, that Jesus is the Christ, and I pray that we may hear his voice by searching the scriptures, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Camilla W. Judd, in Kate B. Carter, comp., *Treasures of Pioneer History*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, 1952-57), 5:240-41; see also Allan K. Burgess, *How to Understand and Enjoy the Scriptures* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1986), pp. 6-7.
2. In Conference Report, Oct. 1979, p. 91; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, p. 64.
3. "The Power of the Word," *Ensign*, May 1986, p. 82.

Elder C. Max Caldwell

The meaning of charity

I have come to know something of the value of the Book of Mormon as a witness for Christ, and I treasure the teachings contained in its sacred pages. Today I would like to discuss one of its unique precepts.

As a young man on a mission, I recall reading Paul's words to the Corinthian Saints and pondering what he meant by the phrase "faith, hope,

charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity" (1 Corinthians 13:13). I wondered why charity should be the greatest. *Charity* was a word I did not understand. Part of the reason for my dilemma was that the common use of the term *charity* did not seem to be consistent with the doctrinal or scriptural use.

As I searched the pages of the Book of Mormon, I gained a new view.

Mormon, an ancient prophet of the Americas, connected the word *charity* to the Savior. He declared that "charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever" (Moroni 7:47).

I considered what was meant by the phrase "love of Christ." That answer is critical because "the Lord God hath given a commandment that all men should have charity, which charity is love" (2 Nephi 26:30). If we must have charity, then we must know what it is. The phrase "love of Christ" might have meaning in three dimensions:

1. Love *for* Christ
2. Love *from* Christ
3. Love *like* Christ

Love for Christ

First, love *for* Christ. This concept proclaims Jesus as the object of our love, and our lives should be an external expression of our gratitude for him. Sometimes that is difficult to do. I once visited a high priests group meeting where an older brother taught us. He noted that "as a people we often pray, 'We thank thee for all the blessings we enjoy.' But what about the blessings we don't enjoy? It can be very hard to be thankful for those." This dear man had just experienced his first Christmas without his sweetheart in more than fifty years. It is difficult to be grateful to the Lord under circumstances we don't enjoy.

Our beloved President Benson told some of his experiences with the Saints in war-torn countries and shared the following: "One sister walked over a thousand miles with four small children, leaving her home in Poland. She lost all four to starvation and the freezing conditions. Yet she stood before us in her emaciated condition, her clothing shredded, and her feet wrapped in burlap, and bore testimony of how blessed she was" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1980, pp. 47-48; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, p. 33). Things we don't enjoy

must not overshadow our reasons to maintain our love for the Savior. Otherwise we may lose our perspective or become bitter, and our love for Christ may be lost.

How deeply do we love him? Does our love depend on favorable environments? Is it diminished or strengthened by our experiences? Is our love for him evident by our behavior and our attitude? Charity, or love *for* Christ, sustains us in every need and influences us in every decision.

Love from Christ

A second dimension of the meaning of charity is love *from* Christ. From a prophet of the Book of Mormon comes an inspired explanation. Speaking to the Lord, Moroni declared:

"Thou hast said that thou hast loved the world, even unto the laying down of thy life for the world. . . .

"This love which thou hast had for the children of men is charity" (Ether 12:33-34).

Through his compliance with the severe requirements of the Atonement, the Savior offered the ultimate expression of love. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). And by permitting his Son to make such a selfless and suffering sacrifice, the Father provided us with an ultimate expression of his love as his gift to the rest of his children.

The Apostle John accurately testified of this infinite though conditional representation of the charity of the Gods when he wrote, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). This gift of charity is to be received. The Savior's act of redemption for our sins is of no effect without our willingness to comply with the conditions of his atonement.

Speaking of the need for us to receive the divine love of God, Moroni prayerfully declared, "Except men shall have charity they cannot inherit that place which thou hast prepared in the mansions of thy Father" (Ether 12:34).

Some years ago I prepared to teach a class on a subject I felt would be particularly difficult. The night before the scheduled class, I prayed for guidance and then retired, still troubled in my mind. When I awoke, a certain thought was introduced to my mind that I shared with the class later that morning. After the class, a young man spoke with me privately and said, "The lesson was for me. I now know what I have to do." Later I learned that he had come to that class as his first contact with the Church in many years. He then proceeded to get his life in order and eventually served a faithful mission. Presently he is experiencing the happiness associated with keeping eternal family covenants. He possesses the gift of charity because he received the atoning love of Christ.

Love like Christ

A third perception of charity is to possess a love that is *like* Christ. In other words, people are the object of Christlike love. Nephi said: "I have charity for my people. . . . I have charity for the Jew. . . . I also have charity for the Gentiles" (2 Nephi 33:7-9).

Since Nephi had such love for everyone, we wonder how he acquired it. He must have lived in anticipation of the divine directive that would later be proclaimed by the Savior as the key to the development of love: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; *as I have loved you*" (John 13:34; italics added).

Jesus' love was inseparably connected to and resulted from his life of serving, sacrificing, and giving in behalf of others. We cannot develop Christlike love except by practicing the process prescribed by the Master.

The Apostle John was not only loved by the Lord, but he also loved others *like* the Lord. John affirmed the process by saying, "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16).

Is it a coincidence that missionaries give a portion of their lives in behalf of others, then come home and testify of their great love for the people they have served? Is it any wonder that bishops and other priesthood and auxiliary leaders who sacrifice for others are filled with love for those who are recipients of their labors? Is there a greater love among mortals than that of a mother, who offers all for her child? Many who desire to have charity like Jesus attain it as he did.

On one occasion my wife expected to be away for the weekend and asked one of the sisters in our ward to teach her Relief Society lesson. The week following the session, that sister came to our home and returned the instruction manual. She also brought to my wife a freshly baked loaf of bread and a handwritten note that read, "I love you. You are a special person. Thank you for thinking of me." She was grateful to have been asked to serve. She was full of the love of Christ.

Charity is not just a precept or a principle, nor is it just a word to describe actions or attitudes. Rather, it is an internal condition that must be developed and experienced in order to be understood. We are possessors of charity when it is a part of our nature. People who have charity have a love for the Savior, have received of his love, and love others as he does.

Charity in the scriptures

It may be of some significance to note that the word *charity* does not appear in a single verse in the Old Testament. Surely the prophets of ancient times understood the need for charity

as did the Apostle Paul and the prophets of ancient America. And surely those prophets knew and taught that “charity is the pure love of Christ” (Moroni 7:47). We are left to wonder if the enemies of Christ deliberately removed from the holy writings these saving truths as part of the plain and precious teachings that Nephi prophetically said would be removed (see 1 Nephi 13:20–29). Also, charity is only partially explained in the New Testament. But thankfully the Book of Mormon, another witness for Christ, has restored to us an understanding of this eternal precept. I testify that as we abide by this precept, we will draw nearer to God. Indeed, we will become more like him.

Individually and collectively, we can experience the peace and happiness enjoyed for nearly two hundred years anciently when “there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people” (4 Nephi 1:15). This I know, as I know the Savior lives, in the holy name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

We have just listened to Elders Merrill J. Bateman and C. Max Caldwell of the Seventy.

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Council of the Twelve Apostles will now address us.

Elder M. Russell Ballard

“See that ye be not troubled”

Living in these difficult times, brothers and sisters, requires each one of us to maintain a positive, hopeful perspective about the future. Today, more so than in the past, I am asked about the signs of the times and if I think the end of the world is near. My answer is the same one that Jesus gave some two thousand years ago:

“But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.

“Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is” (Mark 13:32–33).

When Jesus was asked about the sign of His coming, he said:

“Ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: *see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass*, but the end is not yet.

“For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.

“All these are the beginning of sorrows” (Matthew 24:6–8; italics added).

Acceleration of worldwide calamity

Although the prophecies tell us that these things are to take place, more and more people are expressing great alarm at what appears to be an acceleration of worldwide calamity. As members of the Church, we must not forget the Savior’s admonition: “Be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass.” These are difficult times, when the forces of nature seem to be unleashing a flood of “famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.”

Recently I read a newspaper article that cited statistics from the U.S. Geological Survey indicating that earthquakes around the world are increasing in frequency and intensity. According to the article, only two major earthquakes (earthquakes measuring at least six on the Richter scale) occurred during the 1920s. In the 1930s the number increased to five, and then it decreased