

vation. Nevertheless, many of them did not remain true to their convictions.

We learn from this that it is not what we learn through our physical senses but that which comes under the influence of the Holy Ghost which allows us to understand God's purposes and to follow Him.

When someone has learned these basic principles and ceases to practice them, he loses the light and guide which helps him to understand God and His prophets. The outward sign we see is that they separate themselves, become less active, or even contend against the Church. The inward sign is that they have ceased to practice one or more of these five things:

1. They no longer have a sincere desire to know all the truth.
2. They no longer read the scriptures.
3. They no longer pray.
4. They no longer meditate about eternal truths.
5. They no longer go to church.

Elder Gene R. Cook

Charity—perfect and everlasting love

My dear brothers and sisters, I desire more than anything this hour to bear witness, a personal witness, of the love of God for me, for you, and for all mankind. What man is sufficiently adequate to be able to express the depth of his gratitude in recognition of the love of God? How blessed I have been for so many years to be with you and to have found the pure love of Christ emanating from you. I am deeply indebted to you and to God.

Defining charity

The Lord said that charity is "the pure love of Christ,"¹ that which is "most joyous to the soul,"² "the greatest of all the gifts of God,"³ "perfect" and "everlasting."⁴

As difficult as charity is to describe, it is rather easily recognized in the lives of those who possess it.

Draw closer to God each day

It is wonderful that in a time of great religious confusion, while not yet 15 years old, in the midst of opposition and even persecution, Joseph Smith patiently and diligently demonstrated obedience and showed us the simple but effective way to draw closer to God.

This process requires that we learn, precept upon precept, a little here and a little there, until we develop faith and clear understanding of our divine potential (see 2 Nephi 28:30).

It is our responsibility to strengthen, day by day, the impressions that we feel through the Spirit, by applying these five principles.

It is my prayer that we may do this, constantly, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

- An aged, crippled grandmother who subscribes to an afternoon newspaper, knowing it will bring her delivery-boy grandson to her home every day where, at her knee, she teaches him to pray.

- A mother who, in hard economic times and scarcity of meat, seems to savor only chicken wings, to the puzzlement of all.

- A man who suffers an undeserved public chastisement but humbly receives it anyway.

Is not the common thread in these examples charity, a selflessness, a not seeking for anything in return? All of our divine attributes seem to flow from and be encompassed by this one.⁵ All men may have the gift of love, but charity is bestowed only upon those who are *true* followers of Christ.⁶

The very power of God is found in His attributes of godliness.⁷ The power of

the priesthood is maintained by these attributes.⁸ We seek these attributes, especially charity, the pure love of Christ.⁹

Destroyers of love and peace

Yet there stands the devil, the destroyer of this love, replacing it with anger and hostility.¹⁰ My friend William felt that way—hostile. It seemed that whatever happened, it was the Lord's fault—an illness, a death, a wayward child, a personal weakness, an "unanswered" prayer—all of which hardened his heart. His inner anger, which could flare up in but a moment, was directed toward God, his fellowman, and himself. From his heart emanated unbelief, stubbornness, pride, contention, and a loss of hope, love, and direction. He was miserable!

These destroyers of peace¹¹ blinded William to God's feelings for him. He could neither discover nor *feel* God's love. He did not see, especially in those dark moments, that God was richly blessing him even still. Instead he returned anger for love. Have we not all felt that at times? Even when we have merited love the least, He has loved us the most. Truly, He loves us first.¹²

Suffering with purpose: charity is empowering

Now, my Christlike friend Betty was just the opposite. She encountered many of the same difficulties as did William, but because she *felt* God's love, she suffered tribulation in the Savior's name,¹³ partook of His divine nature,¹⁴ and thus gained a deeper faith in and a love for God, along with the strength to handle whatever might come.

Her love for others increased. She seemed to even forgive others *in advance*. She learned how to cause them to *feel* her love. She learned that love shared is love multiplied.

Finally, she learned to love herself more, being more kind, gentle, and long-

suffering. She stopped her struggle for self-esteem and started loving herself the way God loved her. Her image of herself became His image of her.

Recognizing, receiving, and conveying God's love

How, then, can we better "clothe [ourselves] with the bond of charity, . . . of perfectness and peace"?¹⁵ May I share with you three suggestions.

1. *Recognize His love.* "Pray . . . with all the energy of heart"¹⁶ for this gift. Do so in meekness with a broken heart, and you will be filled with hope and love from the Holy Ghost Himself. He will reveal Christ to you.¹⁷

It is part of the gift of charity to be able to recognize the Lord's hand and feel His love in all that surrounds us. At times it will not be easy to discover the Lord's love for us in all that we experience, because He is a perfect, *anonymous* giver. You will search all your life to uncover His hand and the gifts He has bestowed upon you because of His intimate, modest, humble way of granting such wonderful gifts.

Ponder with me a moment the following majestic gifts: the glories of all creation,¹⁸ the earth, the heavens; your feelings of love and joy; His responses of mercy, forgiveness, and innumerable answers to prayer; the gift of loved ones; and finally the greatest gift of all—the Father's gift of His atoning Son, the perfect one in charity, even the God of love.¹⁹

2. *Receive His love in humility.* Be grateful for the gift and especially for the giver of the gift.²⁰ True gratitude is the ability to humbly see, feel, and even receive love.²¹ Gratitude is a form of returning love to God. Recognize His hand; tell Him so; express your love to Him.²² As you come to truly know the Lord, you will find an intimate, sacred relationship built on trust. You will come to know He understands your anguish²³ and will, in compassion, always respond to you in love.

Receive it. *Feel* it. It is not enough just to know that God loves you. The gift is to be *felt* continually day by day.²⁴ It will then be a divine motivator throughout your life. Repent. Remove any worldliness from your life,²⁵ including anger. Receive a continual remission of your sins,²⁶ and you will bridle all your passions and be filled with love.²⁷

3. *Convey His love.* The Lord's response to us is always filled with love. Should not our response to Him be in kind, with *real* feelings of love? He gives grace (or goodness) for grace, attribute for attribute. As our obedience increases, we receive more grace (or goodness) for the grace we return to Him.²⁸ Offer Him the refinement of your attributes so that when He does appear, you will be *like* Him.²⁹

As a man first immerses his thoughts in love and conveys those feelings to God, man, or self, a magnified portion of that attribute will surely follow from the Spirit. That is true of all godly attributes. Righteous feelings generated by a man seem to precede the increase of those feelings from the Spirit. Unless you are feeling love, you cannot convey true love to others. The Lord has told us to love one another as He loves us,³⁰ so remember: to be loved, *truly* love.³¹

The fruits of the gift of charity

Brothers and sisters, as an especial witness of Christ, I bear testimony to you again of the overwhelming love of God for each of us personally. Magnifying that gift from God will bring a new heart, a pure heart, and ever-increasing love and peace. As we increasingly think and act like Him, the attributes of the natural man will slip away to be replaced by the heart and the mind of Christ.³² We will become like Him and then truly receive Him.³³

The prophet of the Lord here before you loves you, as do all these, my Brethren. May the Lord bless us to always have "the affections of [our] heart . . . placed

upon [Him] forever."³⁴ "That [our] burdens may be light, through the joy of his Son"³⁵ is my prayer in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Moroni 7:47.
2. See 1 Nephi 11:22–23; 8:10–12.
3. 1 Nephi 15:36.
4. Moroni 8:17.
5. "There is one virtue, attribute, or principle, which, if cherished and practiced by the Saints, would prove salvation to thousands upon thousands. I allude to charity, or love, from which proceed forgiveness, long suffering, kindness, and patience" (Brigham Young, *Deseret News*, 11 Jan. 1860, 353).
6. See Moroni 7:48. Is there a difference between charity and love? The Lord referred to them separately a number of times, such as in Doctrine and Covenants 4:5. Some have said charity is love plus sacrifice—a seasoned love. Perhaps charity is to love as faith is to belief. Both faith and charity take action, work, and sacrifice. Charity encompasses His love for us, our love for Him, and Christlike love for others.
7. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:19–24.
8. See Doctrine and Covenants 121:41–46.
9. "A man filled with the love of God, is not content with blessing his family alone, but ranges through the whole world, anxious to bless the whole human race" (Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:227).
10. When real suffering occurs in life, the devil is always there to sour men's hearts in anger, while the Lord continually emanates love. In the same suffering "many had become hardened . . . and many were softened because of their afflictions" (Alma 62:41). What a wonderful example of how to respond to affliction.
11. Some destroyers of men's love and peace include but are not limited to fear, perfectionism, envy, unsubmitiveness, doubt, anger, jealousy, unrighteous control, unbelief, impatience, judging, fostering hurt feelings, pride, contention, murmuring,

seeking for honor, competition, and lying. All of these are of the natural man, and not of the man of Christ.

12. See 1 John 4:19.
13. See Doctrine and Covenants 138:13. My friend knew the suffering would help her prove herself (see Abraham 3:24–25; D&C 98:13–14); learn to choose between good and evil (see 2 Nephi 2:18); learn that blessings come after the trials (see D&C 58:2–4); learn obedience, patience, and faith (see D&C 105:6; Mosiah 23:21; Romans 5:3–5); obtain a forgiveness of sin (see Helaman 15:3; D&C 132:50, 60; 95:1).
14. See 2 Peter 1:1–8.
15. Doctrine and Covenants 88:125.
16. Moroni 7:48.
17. See Moroni 8:25–26; Romans 5:5; 2 Nephi 26:13.
18. See Moses 6:63; Alma 30:44.
19. See 1 John 4:8.
20. See Doctrine and Covenants 88:33.
21. See Alma 5:26.
22. See Alma 26:16; Moroni 10:3.
23. See Doctrine and Covenants 133:52–53.
24. See Alma 34:38.
25. See 1 John 2:15–17.
26. See Mosiah 4:11–12.
27. See Alma 38:12.
28. See Doctrine and Covenants 93:12–13, 20.
29. See 1 John 3:1–3.
30. See John 13:34; Doctrine and Covenants 112:11.
31. “Beware of pride, and not seek to excel one above another, but act for each oth-

er’s good” (Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [1976], 155).

32. See 1 Corinthians 2:16; 2 Corinthians 10:5.
33. “That man is most truly great who is most Christlike. What you sincerely in your heart think of Christ will determine what you are, will largely determine what your acts will be. . . . By choosing him as our ideal, we create within ourselves a desire to be like him, to have fellowship with him” (David O. McKay, in Conference Report, Apr. 1951, 93, 98). If you think about Him long enough, you will begin to act like Him. If you act like Him long enough, you’ll truly become like Him.
34. Alma 37:36.
35. Alma 33:23.

President Monson

The choir and congregation will now sing “How Firm a Foundation.” Following the singing, we will hear testimonies from Sister Bonnie D. Parkin, the new general president of the Relief Society, and Elders Gerald N. Lund and William R. Walker, newly called members of the Seventy. We will then be pleased to hear from Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

The choir and congregation sang
“How Firm a Foundation.”

Sister Bonnie D. Parkin

Expressions of gratitude

Brothers and sisters, there is a saying: “Welcome the opportunity that takes you beyond your ordinary self if you would grow.” And I’m sure I’m going to grow. May I express our thanks to Sister Smoot, Sister Jensen, and Sister Dew for the great service they’ve given to all of us as members of the Church. I express my gratitude

to my counselors, Kathleen Hughes and Anne Pingree, for their willingness to serve. They are women of faith.

I am so grateful this day for my mother and father, for the teachings they gave me, for their love, for teaching me to work. I do know how to work. I am grateful for my husband. Jim is a wonderful companion. I love him, and I’m grateful for his support. He’s a man of integrity.