



Charity, the Pure Love of Christ

*“Love is one of the chief characteristics of Deity,
and ought to be manifested by those
who aspire to be the sons of God.”*

From the Life of Joseph Smith

In a revelation given through Joseph Smith in 1841, the Lord designated the stake in Nauvoo, Illinois, a “cornerstone of Zion, which shall be polished with the refinement which is after the similitude of a palace” (D&C 124:2). Under the Prophet’s direction, Nauvoo became a thriving center of commerce, education, and the arts. Many people worked their farms, while those who had an acre of land in the city grew fruits and vegetables in home gardens. Sawmills, brickyards, printing offices, flour mills, and bakeries sprang up in the city, as well as shops for carpenters, potters, tinsmiths, jewelers, blacksmiths, and cabinetmakers. In Nauvoo, the Saints could enjoy the theater, balls, and concerts. Hundreds of students were enrolled in schools throughout the community, and plans were under way for a university.

As Nauvoo grew rapidly, several brickyards produced the red bricks that gave Nauvoo buildings their distinctive look. One of these buildings was the Prophet’s Red Brick Store. The store was built to serve both as an office for the Prophet and the First Presidency and as a business to help the Prophet support his family. An incident that occurred in the Red Brick Store shows the charitable nature that made the Prophet so beloved.

James Leach was an Englishman who had come to Nauvoo with his convert sister and her husband, Agnes and Henry Nightingale. After looking for work without success, James and Henry determined to ask the Prophet for help. James recalled:



The reconstructed Red Brick Store in Nauvoo. This building served as an office for the Prophet Joseph Smith and as a business to help him support his family. Many Church meetings and social activities were held in the store.

“We . . . found [the Prophet] in a little store selling a lady some goods. This was the first time I had had an opportunity to be near him and get a good look at him. I felt there was a superior spirit in him. He was different to anyone I had ever met before; and I said in my heart, he is truly a Prophet of the most high God.

“As I was not a member of the Church I wanted Henry to ask him for work, but he did not do so, so I had to. I said, ‘Mr. Smith, if you please, have you any employment you could give us both, so we can get some provisions?’ He viewed us with a cheerful countenance, and with such a feeling of kindness, said, ‘Well, boys, what can you do?’ We told him what our employment was before we left our native land.

“Said he, ‘Can you make a ditch?’ I replied we would do the best we could at it. ‘That’s right, boys,’ and picking up a tape line, he said, ‘Come along with me.’

“He took us a few rods from the store, gave me the ring to hold, and stretched all the tape from the reel and marked a line for us to work by. ‘Now, boys,’ said he, ‘can you make a ditch three feet wide and two and a half feet deep along this line?’

“We said we would do our best, and he left us. We went to work, and when it was finished I went and told him it was done. He came and looked at it and said, ‘Boys, if I had done it myself it could not have been done better. Now come with me.’

“He led the way back to his store, and told us to pick the best ham or piece of pork for ourselves. Being rather bashful, I said we would rather he would give us some. So he picked two of the largest and best pieces of meat and a sack of flour for each of us, and asked us if that would do. We told him we would be willing to do more work for it, but he said, ‘If you are satisfied, boys, I am.’

“We thanked him kindly, and went on our way home rejoicing in the kind-heartedness of the Prophet of our God.”

James Leach was baptized that same year and recorded that he “often had the privilege of seeing [the Prophet’s] noble face lit up by the Spirit and power of God.”¹

Teachings of Joseph Smith

A person filled with the love of God is anxious to bless others.

“Love is one of the chief characteristics of Deity, and ought to be manifested by those who aspire to be the sons of God. 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.”²

Lucy Meserve Smith recorded the following: “[Joseph Smith] said, ‘Brethren and sisters, love one another; love one another and be merciful to your enemies.’ He repeated these words in a very emphatic tone of voice with a loud amen.”³

In July 1839, the Prophet spoke to a group of Church leaders: “I then addressed them and gave much instruction . . . touching upon many subjects of importance and value to all who wish to walk humbly before the Lord, and especially teaching them to observe charity, wisdom and fellow-feeling, with love one towards another in all things, and under all circumstances.”⁴

We have a special obligation to love and care for those in need.

“It is a duty which every Saint ought to render to his brethren freely—to always love them, and ever succor them. To be justified before God we must love one another: we must overcome evil; we must visit the fatherless and the widow in their affliction, and we must keep ourselves unspotted from the world; for such virtues flow from the great fountain of pure religion [see James 1:27].”⁵

“[A member of the Church] is to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to provide for the widow, to dry up the tear of the orphan, to comfort the afflicted, whether in this church, or in any other, or in no church at all, wherever he finds them.”⁶

“The rich cannot be saved without charity, giving to feed the poor when and how God requires.”⁷

“Consider the state of the afflicted and try to alleviate their sufferings; let your bread feed the hungry, and your clothing cover the naked; let your liberality dry up the tear of the orphan, and

cheer the disconsolate widow; let your prayers, and presence, and kindness, alleviate the pains of the distressed, and your liberality contribute to their necessities; do good unto all men, especially unto the household of faith, that you may be harmless and blameless, the sons of God without rebuke. Keep the commandments of God—all that he has given, does give, or will give, and an halo of glory will shine around your path; the poor will rise up and call you blessed; you will be honored and respected by all good men; and your path will be that of the just, which shineth brighter and brighter until the perfect day [see Proverbs 4:18].”⁸

“The Holy Spirit . . . shall be poured out at all times upon your heads, when you are exercised with those principles of righteousness that are agreeable to the mind of God, and are properly affected one toward another, and are careful by all means to remember those who are in bondage, and in heaviness, and in deep affliction for your sakes. And if there are any among you who aspire after their own aggrandizement, and seek their own opulence, while their brethren are groaning in poverty, and are under sore trials and temptations, they cannot be benefited by the intercession of the Holy Spirit, which maketh intercession for us day and night with groanings that cannot be uttered [see Romans 8:26].

“We ought at all times to be very careful that such high-mindedness shall never have place in our hearts; but condescend to men of low estate, and with all long-suffering bear the infirmities of the weak.”⁹

Charity is long-suffering, merciful, and kind.

Eliza R. Snow reported an address given by the Prophet: “He then commenced reading the 13th chapter [of 1 Corinthians]—‘Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal;’ and said, don’t be limited in your views with regard to your neighbor’s virtue, but beware of self-righteousness, and be limited in the estimate of your own virtues, and not think yourselves more righteous than others; you must enlarge your souls towards each other, if you would do like Jesus, and carry your fellow-creatures

to Abraham's bosom. He said he had manifested long-suffering, forbearance and patience towards the Church, and also to his enemies; and we must bear with each other's failings, as an indulgent parent bears with the foibles of his children.

“. . . As you increase in innocence and virtue, as you increase in goodness, let your hearts expand, let them be enlarged towards others; you must be long-suffering, and bear with the faults and errors of mankind. How precious are the souls of men! . . .

“. . . Don't envy the finery and fleeting show of sinners, for they are in a miserable situation; but as far as you can, have mercy on them, for in a short time God will destroy them, if they will not repent and turn unto him.”¹⁰

“Wise men ought to have understanding enough to conquer men with kindness. ‘A soft answer turneth away wrath,’ says the wise man [Proverbs 15:1]; and it will be greatly to the credit of the Latter-day Saints to show the love of God, by now kindly treating those who may have, in an unconscious moment, done wrong; for truly said Jesus, Pray for thine enemies [see Matthew 5:44].”¹¹

“I do not dwell upon your faults, and you shall not upon mine. Charity, which is love, covereth a multitude of sins [see 1 Peter 4:8], and I have often covered up all the faults among you; but the prettiest thing is to have no faults at all. We should cultivate a meek, quiet and peaceable spirit.”¹²

Eliza R. Snow reported another address given by the Prophet: “When persons manifest the least kindness and love to me, O what power it has over my mind, while the opposite course has a tendency to harrow up all the harsh feelings and depress the human mind.

“It is one evidence that men are unacquainted with the principles of godliness to behold the contraction of affectionate feelings and lack of charity in the world. The power and glory of godliness is spread out on a broad principle to throw out the mantle of charity. God does not look on sin with allowance, but when men have sinned, there must be allowance made for them. . . . 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 them upon our shoulders, and cast their sins behind our backs. . . .

“. . . How oft have wise men and women sought to dictate Brother Joseph by saying, ‘Oh, if I were Brother Joseph, I would do this and that;’ but if they were in Brother Joseph’s shoes they would find that men or women could not be compelled into the kingdom of God, but must be dealt with in long-suffering, and at last we shall save them. The way to keep all the Saints together, and keep the work rolling, is to wait with all long-suffering, till God shall bring such characters to justice. There should be no license for sin, but mercy should go hand in hand with reproof.”¹³

**We express charity through simple acts
of service and kindness.**

“I am your servant, and it is only through the Holy Ghost that I can do you good. . . . We do not present ourselves before you as anything but your humble servants, willing to spend and be spent in your service.”¹⁴

Edwin Holden recalled: “In 1838, Joseph and some of the young men were playing various out-door games, among which was a game of ball. By and by they began to get weary. He saw it, and calling them together he said: ‘Let us build a log cabin.’ So off they went, Joseph and the young men, to build a log cabin for a widow woman. Such was Joseph’s way, always assisting in whatever he could.”¹⁵

Lucy Mack Smith, the Prophet Joseph Smith’s mother, said of the time when the Saints were first settling in Commerce, Illinois, later called Nauvoo: “As the season advanced, the brethren who had settled here began to feel the effects of their hardships, which, joined to the unhealthiness of the climate, brought them down with agues and bilious fevers to such an extent that there were some whole families in which there was not one who was able to give another a drink of cold water or even to help themselves. Hyrum’s family were mostly sick. My youngest daughter, Lucy, was also very sick, and there were, in fact, but few of the inhabitants of the place who were well.



“Off they went, Joseph and the young men, to build a log cabin for a widow woman. Such was Joseph’s way, always assisting in whatever he could.”

“Joseph and Emma had the sick brought to their house and took care of them there. And they continued to have them brought as fast as they were taken down until their house, which consisted of four rooms, was so crowded that they were under the necessity of spreading a tent in the yard for the reception of that part of the family who were still on their feet. Joseph and Emma devoted their whole time and attention to the care of the sick during this time of distress.”¹⁶

*John L. Smith, the Prophet’s cousin, recalled the following incident that occurred in this same period of time: “The Prophet Joseph and cousin Hyrum, his brother, visited us. We were all sick but Mother with the fever and ague, and Father was out of his head the greatest part of the time. Joseph took the shoes from his feet when he saw our destitute condition and put them on Father’s feet, as he was barefoot, and rode home without any himself. He sent and took Father home to his house and saved his life and supplied us with many comforts so we recovered.”*¹⁷

Elizabeth Ann Whitney recalled: “Early in the Spring of 1840 we went up to Commerce, as the upper portion of the city of Nauvoo continued to be called. We rented a house belonging to Hiram Kimball. . . . Here we were all sick with ague, chills and fever, and were only just barely able to crawl around and wait upon each other. Under these trying circumstances my ninth child was born. Joseph, upon visiting us and seeing our change of circumstances, urged us at once to come and share his accommodations. We felt the climate, the water, and the privations we were enduring could not much longer be borne; therefore we availed ourselves of this proposal and went to live in the Prophet Joseph’s yard in a small cottage; we soon recruited in health, and the children became more like themselves. My husband was employed in a store Joseph had built and fitted up with such goods as the people were in actual need of.

“One day while coming out of the house into the yard the remembrance of a prophecy Joseph Smith had made to me, while living in our house in Kirtland, flashed through my mind like an electric shock; it was this: that even as we had done by him, in opening our doors to him and his family when he was without a home; even so should we in the future be received by him into his house.”¹⁸

Mosiab L. Hancock reported the following experience that occurred in Nauvoo while he was a youth: “This summer [1841] I played my first game of ball with the Prophet. We took turns knocking and chasing the ball, and when the game was over the Prophet said, ‘Brethren, hitch up your teams,’ which we did, and we all drove to the woods. I drove our one-horse wagon standing on the front bolster, and Brother Joseph and father rode on the hounds behind [the *bolster* and *bounds* are structural parts of a wagon]. There were 39 teams in the group and we gathered wood until our wagons were loaded. When our wagon was loaded, Brother Joseph offered to pull sticks with anyone—and he pulled them all up one at a time—with anyone who wanted to compete with him.

“Afterwards, the Prophet sent the wagons out to different places of people who needed help; and he told them to cut the



During a time of much sickness in Commerce, Illinois, Joseph and Emma Smith brought the sick to their home and cared for them there.

wood for the Saints who needed it. Everybody loved to do as the Prophet said, and even though we were sickly, and death was all around us, folks smiled and tried to cheer everyone up.”¹⁹

On January 5, 1842, the Prophet wrote the following in a letter to Edward Hunter, who later served as Presiding Bishop: “Our assortment [at the Red Brick Store] is tolerably good—very good, considering the different purchases made by different individuals at different times, and under circumstances which controlled their choice to some extent; but I rejoice that we have been enabled to do as well as we have, for the hearts of many of the poor brethren and sisters will be made glad with those comforts which are now within their reach.

“The store has been filled to overflowing, and I have stood behind the counter all day, dealing out goods as steady as any clerk you ever saw, to oblige those who were compelled to go without their usual Christmas and New Year’s dinners, for the want of a little sugar, molasses, raisins, etc., etc.; and to please myself also, for I love to wait upon the Saints, and be a servant to all, hoping that I may be exalted in the due time of the Lord.”²⁰

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Consider these ideas as you study the chapter or as you prepare to teach. For additional help, see pages vii–xii.

- As you review the stories on pages 423–25 and pages 429–32, ponder your feelings toward the Prophet Joseph Smith. What do these stories teach about him? In what ways do you think his actions influenced the people around him? In what ways has your life been touched by the kindness of others?
- Review the first three paragraphs on page 426. Why do you think that a person filled with the love of God wants to bless all mankind? How can our acts of love and kindness help to bless all people?
- What are some responsibilities we have in caring for those in need? (For some examples, see pages 426–27.) How do these responsibilities relate to people’s temporal needs? How do they relate to spiritual needs? What examples have you seen of people caring for those in need?
- Read the paragraph that begins at the bottom of page 427. What can we do to grow in our appreciation of others’ virtues? Why do you think we should “beware of self-righteousness, and be limited in the estimate of [our] own virtues”?
- The Prophet Joseph expressed concern about “the contraction of affectionate feelings . . . in the world” (page 428). In contrast, he said that we should “enlarge [our] souls towards each other” and “let [our] hearts expand, let them be enlarged towards others” (pages 427–28). What do you think it means to enlarge our hearts and souls toward each other?
- Read the fifth full paragraph on page 428. In what ways can we apply this teaching as we interact with our family members?

Related Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 13:1–13; Mosiah 4:14–16, 26–27; Ether 12:33–34; Moroni 7:45–48; D&C 121:45–46

Notes

1. James Leach, in "Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith," *Juvenile Instructor*, Mar. 1, 1892, pp. 152–53; punctuation modernized; paragraph divisions altered.
2. *History of the Church*, 4:227; from a letter from Joseph Smith to the Twelve, Dec. 15, 1840, Nauvoo, Illinois, published in *Times and Seasons*, Jan. 1, 1841, p. 258; this letter is incorrectly dated Oct. 19, 1840, in *History of the Church*.
3. Lucy Meserve Smith, in "Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith," *Juvenile Instructor*, Aug. 1, 1892, p. 471.
4. *History of the Church*, 3:383; from a Joseph Smith journal entry, July 2, 1839, Montrose, Iowa.
5. *History of the Church*, 2:229, footnote; from "To the Saints Scattered Abroad," *Messenger and Advocate*, June 1835, p. 137.
6. Editor's reply to a letter from Richard Savary, *Times and Seasons*, Mar. 15, 1842, p. 732; Joseph Smith was the editor of the periodical.
7. *History of the Church*, 4:608; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on May 1, 1842, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards.
8. "To the Saints of God," an editorial published in *Times and Seasons*, Oct. 15, 1842, p. 952; Joseph Smith was the editor of the periodical.
9. *History of the Church*, 3:299; punctuation modernized; from a letter from Joseph Smith and others to Edward Partridge and the Church, Mar. 20, 1839, Liberty Jail, Liberty, Missouri.
10. *History of the Church*, 4:606–7; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 28, 1842, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Eliza R. Snow; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
11. *History of the Church*, 6:219; paragraph divisions altered; from "Pacific Innuendo," an article written under the direction of Joseph Smith, Feb. 17, 1844, Nauvoo, Illinois; published in *Times and Seasons*, Feb. 15, 1844, p. 443; this issue of the *Times and Seasons* was published late.
12. *History of the Church*, 5:517; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on July 23, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
13. *History of the Church*, 5:24; spelling modernized; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on June 9, 1842, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Eliza R. Snow.
14. *History of the Church*, 5:355; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 13, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards.
15. Edwin Holden, in "Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith," *Juvenile Instructor*, Mar. 1, 1892, p. 153; punctuation modernized.
16. Lucy Mack Smith, "The History of Lucy Smith, Mother of the Prophet," 1844–45 manuscript, book 17, p. 7, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
17. John Lyman Smith, *Autobiography and Diaries, 1846–95*, photocopy, vol. 1, entry for Sept. 1839, Church Archives.
18. Elizabeth Ann Whitney, "A Leaf from an Autobiography," *Woman's Exponent*, Nov. 15, 1878, p. 91.
19. Mosiah Lyman Hancock, *Autobiography*, typescript, p. 22, Church Archives.
20. *History of the Church*, 4:492; from a letter from Joseph Smith to Edward Hunter, Jan. 5, 1842, Nauvoo, Illinois.