

# LIGHT REFLECTIONS

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## Charity Never Faileth

The Book of Mormon concludes with a ringing summons—three times repeated—to faith, hope, and charity (see Ether 12; Moro. 7; 10). In the most extensive treatment, Mormon promises that “charity never faileth,” and he warns that “all [other] things must fail” (Moro. 7:46). In my experience, we attend more to the promise than to the warning. We emblazon banners proclaiming that charity never faileth, but we don’t always emphasize that everything else does. Yes, charity never fails, but the converse is also true: late or soon, now and forever, the absence of charity fails spectacularly.

Prophets have taught this plainly. “Anger never persuades,” said President Russell M. Nelson. “Hostility builds no one. Contention never leads to inspired solutions.”<sup>1</sup> President Nelson reiterated that teaching in his final general conference message,<sup>2</sup> as well as in a *Time Magazine* essay just weeks before his death.<sup>3</sup> President Dallin H. Oaks has reinforced similar precepts for decades.<sup>4</sup>

If “faith, hope, charity, and love . . . qualify [us] for the work,” then surely a lack of charity, “the greatest of all” virtues, is categorically disqualifying (D&C 4:5; Moro. 7:46). We cannot access heaven’s help or God’s power without it (see D&C 121:41-42).

This lesson is easy to state but hard to remember—and harder still to apply. Charity has never come naturally or easily to me, but recently it has felt unusually elusive. I have found myself, at times, less generous in what I think, less measured in what I say. I bristle more at being misinterpreted, and I chafe at taxes on my time. I sometimes find myself more prone to pique, more susceptible to snark, less patient with those who don’t see what I see. While I was shaving this

morning, Lia offered wise counsel about various things that were bothering me, then closed with the best counsel of all. “Mostly,” she said, “I think you should pray for charity.”

As usual (i.e. *always*), she’s right. For although convenient excuses lie at hand—heavy responsibilities at home, at church, and on campus; insufficient sleep and surplus strain—the problem, ultimately, lies within. And the solution lies above. Charity, in the end, is a gift. We can strive toward it, practice it, and imitate the charity we see in others. But we cannot attain to charity on our own. It comes, when it comes at all, as a grace.

“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” (Moro. 7:48).

In addition to the well-known scriptural descriptions of charity (see 1 Cor. 13:4-7; Moro. 7:45), I love this definition from Elder Marvin J. Ashton:

“Perhaps the greatest charity comes when we are kind to each other, when we don’t judge or categorize someone else, when we simply give each other the benefit of the doubt or remain quiet. Charity is accepting someone’s differences, weaknesses, and shortcomings; having patience with someone who has let us down; or resisting the impulse to become offended when someone doesn’t handle something the way we might have hoped. Charity is refusing to take advantage of another’s weakness and being willing to forgive someone who has hurt us. Charity is expecting the best of each other.”<sup>5</sup>

These are critical principles—in our personal and family relationships, on our campus and in the Kingdom—not least because the way we treat others reflects the kind of disciples we are. “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35).

And yet these principles are not easy to apply—in part because we care so much about the issues that confront us, and the adversary opposes the Lord’s work by sowing divisions among His servants. The devil’s watchword, in all ages, is *enmity*—“the quality,” wrote Noah Webster, “of being an enemy; the opposite of friendship.”<sup>6</sup> Satan tempts us to see others as enemies—to view every disagreement as an expression of hostility, to see every difference of opinion as evidence of mistrust.

Carl Schmitt, the notorious German legal theorist, famously opined that enmity is the essence of the political—the distinction, that is, between friend and foe, the mark between *Freund* and *Feind*.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps that is why another (and greater) German thinker, Max Weber, proclaimed

that politics is “a deal with the devil” (*ein Teufelspakt*).<sup>8</sup>

Ours is an age of ubiquitous enmity, but our campus can be an oasis of charity. That aspiration is inscribed in our mission statement: “Certainly all relationships within the BYU community should reflect devout love of God and a loving, genuine concern for the welfare of our neighbor.”<sup>9</sup> It is also echoed in our Aims: “The students, faculty, and staff in this community possess a remarkable diversity of gifts, but they all think of themselves as brothers and sisters seeking together to master the academic disciplines while remaining mastered by the higher claims of discipleship to the Savior.”<sup>10</sup>

When I read these words, I thank heaven for repentance—for the Atonement of Jesus Christ and for His “church of fresh starts” and “new beginnings.”<sup>11</sup> I thank heaven for the charity I see so pervasively on this campus—for the gift that never fails, even when I fail it.

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<sup>1</sup> Russell M. Nelson, “Peacemakers Needed,” *Liahona*, May 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Russell M. Nelson, “Confidence in the Presence of God,” *Liahona*, May 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Russell M. Nelson, “We All Deserve Dignity and Respect,” *Time*, September 5, 2025.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Dallin H. Oaks, “Following Christ,” *Liahona*, November 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Marvin J. Ashton, “The Tongue Can Be a Sharp Sword,” *Ensign*, May 1992.

<sup>6</sup> Webster’s 1828 Dictionary, s.v. “Enmity.”

<sup>7</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen* (1932).

<sup>8</sup> Max Weber, *Politik als Beruf* (1919).

<sup>9</sup> “The Mission of Brigham Young University” (1981).

<sup>10</sup> “The Aims of a BYU Education” (1995).

<sup>11</sup> Patrick Kearon, “Jesus Christ and Your New Beginning,” *Liahona*, November 2025.