

## **LDS Business College Forum**

# **"The Essential Virtues of Gratitude and Charity"**

**By Mike Orme**

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Let me begin by saying that I really consider it a high honor and a privilege to be asked to speak in this setting. I have a high regard for the great leaders you have at this college. After reading and studying about the history and the background of the LDS Business College, I have concluded that it is a wonderful, inspired institution with a central role in higher education in the Church.

In thinking about what to say to you today, I decided to discuss the upcoming holidays and the essential virtues of gratitude and charity associated with them. This may seem strange coming from a lawyer. Indeed, thinking deeply about gratitude and charity is something of a new experience for me. But I would like to pass on a few thoughts for you to ponder as you enter the holiday season.

I was sitting in my office just the other day talking with Chief Larry Stott, the chief of police at BYU, about some legal issues. From my office, there is a sweeping panoramic view across north Utah County and Mount Timpanogos. Both Chief Stott and I remarked about the wonderful quality of light on the mountains this time of year. The light is low and there are dramatic highlights along with more subtle variations and nuances. It is a special quality of light, an almost spiritual visual quality that only lasts for a few weeks, but it is very evident during the month of November.

Also, in November, we rapidly lose daylight and as we go home from work, usually after 5:30 p.m., we find it's already dark. In the daytime, we look up at the mountains and notice there's a light snow. We listen to weather reports and we know more snow is on the way, and it puts us in a different, more sober frame of mind. What I think we realize, at first subconsciously and then more consciously, is that the harvest is ended, the summer is over, and now we are looking forward to the holidays. And, we have the two great high holidays coming up. First, of course, is Thanksgiving, which is in just a few short weeks, and then, we have the Christmas season. We look forward with anticipation partly because we connect these holidays with spiritual values. We also connect them with friends, families, and good times.

Today I would like to discuss two spiritual virtues or values that are connected with these two holidays.

When I think of Thanksgiving, what immediately comes to my mind is a Norman Rockwell picture. You've all got it in your mind, right? The family sitting around the dinner table, the patriarch at the head of the table, the great turkey in the middle, and the family characters who are all there; and they are so American and so memorable. As I think of my own Thanksgivings, they were an "over the river and through the woods" kind of experience. You go to Grandmother's house; you then eat yourself silly. You meet with your crazy relatives, and then you watch lots of football. But sometimes lost in this holiday, of course, is what we're really supposed to be learning, which is the essential, important, and what I would call foundational value of learning gratitude. I want to talk about that a little bit.

When we think of Christmas, we realize that Christmas isn't just a holiday. It's more of a season. It begins sometime right after Halloween, but it really picks up speed after Thanksgiving. And we, of course, remember the birth of the Savior, and we remember His great atoning sacrifice. But it's a season which also calls for brotherly love and for charity. It is so special and magical. We have wonderful parties; there is the anticipation of Christmas Day, the magic of Christmas morning, the opening of gifts, and special family traditions. In our family, one of the things that we do on Christmas Eve—it's kind of quirky and 70s-ish—is have a fondue party. When we're through with that, we read the Christmas story from Luke. However, when I think of Christmas and spiritual virtues, I'd like to focus today on the virtue of charity. So, as a reminder, Thanksgiving is all about gratitude and Christmas is focused on charity. Charity, I suggest, is the greatest virtue, while gratitude is a foundational virtue that leads to charity. Charity, however, is the ultimate virtue that we should strive to attain.

Let me take you back to the very first Thanksgiving. You know the story, but I want to remind you of some of the details. The Pilgrims were a group of what were called "Puritan Separatists" from back in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century in England. They had rediscovered the scriptures. They wanted to separate themselves from the state-sponsored Church of England so they could worship as they pleased. They were a covenant-making people. They believed, like we do, in making covenants with their Heavenly Father, and they wanted freedom of religion, to worship as they wanted. So they took a big, audacious step and they left England, their homeland and moved to Holland. In Holland, they had a measure of freedom of religion. But it bothered them

that their children were growing up as a new generation not speaking English. They were losing their connection with the English way of life. So they concluded that they would embark upon a religious adventure and move to America.

Think about what a harrowing experience that would have been---jumping on a small ship and sailing across the North Atlantic in the late fall and early winter and establishing a colony in America. In reading their diaries and their histories, it is really clear that the hand of the Lord guided them to America.

The Pilgrims had a charter from the King to settle in Virginia. However, they were blown off course and ultimately landed in what is now Cape Cod Bay, Massachusetts, in November of 1620. One of the first things the Pilgrims did before they got out on land was to enact “The Mayflower Compact,” which was a social compact of how they were going to govern themselves based on fairly democratic features for that time. The Mayflower Compact was a precursor to the American Constitution. Interestingly, when the Pilgrims moved onto land, they didn't find any Indians because a mysterious plague had recently come through and wiped out all of the hostile Indians that lived in the Plymouth area. So, they found a fertile land, devoid of Indians; nevertheless, they had a very difficult time. In the first winter in Massachusetts Bay, 46 of the original 102 settlers, nearly one-half of those early settlers died. Yet when the spring came—you know the story—a miracle happened. They were befriended by Indians. You know the names of Samoset, Squanto and Chief Massasoit. They taught the Pilgrims how to farm and how to fish. They nursed them through that first summer in Massachusetts; and by the fall of 1621, after the harvest was in, these surviving Pilgrims, joined by 91 Indians, had the very first Thanksgiving to give thanks to our Heavenly Father for the very fact that they were able to come to America and that they had survived. Moreover, they had these great friends, these American Indians.

For the next fifty years, there was a basically friendly relationship between the Pilgrims and the Indians. Many thousands of Puritans left England and came to America and a very substantial number of Indians were converted to Christianity. And, the tradition of Thanksgiving became firmly established.

As we move forward in history, in 1789 George Washington called a national day of thanksgiving to celebrate the winning of the War of Independence and the establishment of the Constitution. In 1863, Abraham Lincoln, another one of our truly great presidents, established Thanksgiving as a national day of thanksgiving. This was at the very height of the Civil War, the

most tragic war in American history, when more American lives proportionate to the population were lost than in any other war.

As a result, Thanksgiving is now a marvelous tradition when we set aside a special, designated day to be grateful to our Father in Heaven. But I want to suggest today that gratitude isn't just a good idea and a national tradition. Gratitude is a gospel doctrine; it's a commandment that comes directly from our Father in Heaven. In the Doctrine and Covenants 59:21, there is this verse: "And in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things, and obey not his commandments." Now think about that. It's a commandment that we be grateful.

God doesn't command us to be grateful because he needs our thanks. He doesn't sit in the heaven wondering, "Gee, where are those folks and why aren't they sending their thanks to me for all the wonderful things I've done for them?" Rather, he commands us to be grateful because he understands that gratitude is a foundational virtue upon which our own happiness and our own spiritual progress depends. To teach the principle of gratitude, the Savior spun a parable recorded in the New Testament. I refer to it as the parable of the Thankful Samaritan. I will contrast that later with the parable of the Good Samaritan. This Thankful Samaritan parable is found in Luke 17:11-19. Let me read that to you out of the scriptures:

"And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.

"And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off:

"And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.

"And when he saw them, he said to them, Go show yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.

"And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice, glorified God,

"And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan.

"And Jesus answering said Were there not ten cleansed?" Then he asks this question: "But where are the nine?"

"There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.

"And he said unto hem, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole."

The really pregnant question here is, with ten lepers healed, why did only one come back to

express gratitude to the Savior? We know that leprosy was a dreadful, awful, wasting disease like being part of the living dead. We know these nine people who were cured were obedient to some degree because they went to the priest as Jesus directed them. So, why is it that they neglected to go back and say thanks after getting cured of this horrific disease?

I challenge all of us to liken the scriptures unto ourselves. I think the Savior wants us to ask ourselves, "Why aren't people more grateful? What is it that causes us not to express gratitude?" As I have reflected upon this event and human nature, I think that what may have happened with these lepers is they were so excited about their own great, good fortune and so self-centered about escaping this dreadful disease that it just didn't occur to them in their happiness that they should go back and thank the person who made it possible.

Unfortunately, I think a lot of us are like that. We receive blessings both large and small all the time. However, because we are centered on ourselves, we don't go beyond ourselves and express gratitude to those people who made our blessings possible.

I want to tell you a story that I think illustrates how we need to think about the principle of gratitude. At all times—at times of our greatest triumphs and even at times when we have the most adversity in our lives---the Lord expects us to be grateful.

I'm a huge college football fan. I especially enjoy watching BYU play football. I've been watching the BYU Cougars for years. One of the things that was really miraculous—this is along the lines of parting the Red Sea—was back in 1984 when BYU won a national championship in football. You are probably too young to remember that. But it was a miracle. You wonder, how could this happen? BYU was an awful football team for years then along comes this almost prophet-like figure in Lavell Edwards. He came out of nowhere and won all these conference championships and then, finally, won a national championship right here in Provo, Utah. We were all amazed by this and pretty excited.

I remember reading an interview of one of the players on that team that taught me a real lesson about gratitude. He said after they had beaten Michigan in the Holiday Bowl, it was clear they were going to be the national champions; and, as you might expect, there had been great excitement in the locker room. After the media had finished the post-game interviews and the players had gotten dressed and left, this player returned to the locker room for something he had forgotten. There he saw Coach Edwards kneeling down in the locker room by himself praying to the Lord and thanking him for the opportunity his football team had had to play

in this great game and to win the national championship. I thought to myself, if I had won a national championship, would I have remembered to thank the Lord or would I have been partying with my friends and thinking about all the great things we had accomplished?

We need to be thinking about gratitude all the time. Coach Edwards is a good example of someone who keeps gratitude foremost in his mind.

One of the things I have enjoyed recently has been touring through your new building. What a great facility this is—the useful technology you have and how centrally located you are. It offers you great opportunities to grow. But when you think about it, how did you get here to this marvelous facility? It didn't just happen overnight. There are over a hundred years of history, of people who have sacrificed, and leaders that have had a vision to get you to this place in time. When we come to this great facility and we have this opportunity to go to a Church school, do we have a sense of gratitude or do we just take it for granted? Is our attitude: "Well, here it is; I paid my tuition; this is what I deserve." There are chances for us every day to express our gratitude verbally and by our conduct.

Getting back to the parable of the lepers, we wonder not only why the nine didn't express their gratitude, but also why the Thankful Samaritan did express his gratitude. What made him different? What compelled him to return and express thanks? Again, we don't know for certain. We're left to speculate. However, we know he was a Samaritan. We know that the Samaritans were a lower class, despised people in the Holy Land. He probably came from a lesser socioeconomic background. In my experience, people who are more humble tend to be more grateful. There seems to be an inverse relationship between how prosperous we are (between the titles and the awards that we get) and our level of humbleness and gratitude.

One of the biggest concerns that Brigham Young had after the pioneers arrived here in the valley was that the people would become prosperous; that they would forget their God; and that they would cease to be grateful. It is a challenge for us to live in this momentous time, when we have so many opportunities and blessings, and still be humble and grateful.

How should we express our gratitude? The key is found in the scriptures---keep the commandments. We show the Lord that we're grateful by what we do as well as what we say. We have opportunities all around us to express gratitude.

One way to do that, I think, is to express gratitude to all of our self-sacrificing Church leaders. You will have an opportunity to go to tithing settlement soon. I would hope that you would take

that opportunity to express thanks to your bishop for all of the hard work and time and effort he put in on your behalf.

President Monson of the First Presidency talks famously, does he not, about having an attitude of gratitude. Some of the people he believes we need to be cognizant of are our mothers who nurture us, our fathers who protect us, our teachers who guide us and teach us, our friends who support us, and our own countries, our native lands. I'm an American and am very proud of this country. I watched the news last night and noticed we had a peaceful transfer of power in Congress from one party to the other. We have a great democratic tradition. I'm grateful to live under an inspired Constitution.

Perhaps our greatest blessing is the Atonement of Jesus Christ. That is something that we should be cognizant of every day of our lives.

Now that's the end of my little spiel on gratitude and Thanksgiving. I want to now shift gears, if you will, and I want to have you think a little bit about Christmas and charity and how these concepts tie together. Just as Thanksgiving precedes Christmas on the calendar, gratitude precedes charity in the holiday season. I believe that if we develop the important foundational virtue of gratitude, it helps us develop a more important virtue which is charity, "the pure love of Christ."

To illustrate this, I want to talk a little more about our friends the Pilgrims. Back in the 1970s, there was a broadcaster named Paul Harvey. He used to have a program that he called "The Rest of the Story." He would tell some story that we were all familiar with; then he'd say, "there's a second part of the story that's not as well known." He would then relate it. I want to tell you the "rest of the story" about the Pilgrims and Thanksgiving and how it relates to developing charity in our lives.

When you study American history, we tend to jump, in the popular mind, from the First Thanksgiving where the Pilgrims and the Indians were sitting around and singing "Kumbaya" and being friends, to the American Revolution---over 100 years later---as though nothing important happened in between these events. What did happen in this intervening century? Well, a number of extremely important things happened. For fifty years, the Pilgrims and the Indians lived together in relative peace. But there was a terrible, almost genocidal, war between them in 1675. It was called King Philip's War. This war is recounted in a fascinating book that I read this summer that I'll give a plug for. It's called *The Mayflower: The Story of the Pilgrims after the First Thanksgiving* authored by Nathaniel Philbrick. This is the story that Philbrick tells in his book. After the first generation of Pilgrims and Indians had died off, the second generation of Pilgrims became quite

worldly. They started to collect lands and riches and they were expanding out over all of New England. They also began to lose touch with their spiritual side. In fact, they lost so much spirituality in relation to the church that they had established—remember, I talked to you about them being a covenant-making people—that for the rising generation, the Church did not raise the standards or “raise the bar” like we did with our missionaries. Instead they said, "We'll lower the bar." As a result, they developed something called the Halfway Covenant for the rising generation. They only had to be half as righteous and half as committed as their parents to enter into the covenant. So you can see that the Pilgrims were slipping a little bit here.

On the other hand, the Indians had been introduced to European goods, and they liked them a lot. They enjoyed all these goods and commodities that they could order from England. But paying for the goods was a problem. The Indians began paying for these commodities by selling off their land to the Pilgrims and by killing a lot of the wildlife that they had historically depended upon. They were not being good stewards. The more foreign goods they bought and the more they sold off their heritage, the more desperate their situation became. The Indians began to realize that this was not sustainable, that they were rapidly reaching the point where they could not live off the land any longer.

Increased tension resulted from the Pilgrim's lack of spirituality and the Indians selling off their heritage. A Book of Mormon-type of war finally broke out. The historians tell us that next to the Civil War, King Philip's War took more American lives and accounted for more bloodshed per capita than any other war fought by Americans.

Of course, the war ended with the Indians being almost totally annihilated in New England. They almost ceased to exist as a people. Among the English, there were also devastating, terrible losses, but they were able to replenish these losses because of the vast number of new immigrants who were constantly arriving from England.

What happened from the First Thanksgiving to a genocidal war fifty years later? The answer is found in the Book of Mormon which tell us about another group of people who fought a genocidal war. You will recall at the very end of the Book of Mormon, Moroni, the last prophet, is surveying the scene. His people, the Nephites, have been completely annihilated. Only the Lamanites are left and they have lost their way in a spiritual sense. They have dwindled in unbelief and war constantly among themselves.

As Moroni surveys this scene of devastation, he thinks about the implications it has for our

time, for those of us who are going to read the Book of Mormon. His reflections are found in Moroni 7:46-47: "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth. Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all, for all things must fail

"But 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."

Like the Nephites and the Lamanites of the Book of Mormon and the Pilgrims and the Indians of colonial New England, today we have similar tribal wars going on such as in Iraq with the fighting between the Shiites and the Sunnis. And, what is the root cause of this hatred, destruction, and unhappiness? It is a lack of charity, the neighborly love that people should have for one another.

Now that, then, tells us that we need to think about how we develop charity in our lives. And again, the Savior gives us an excellent parable about how to do this. And this is in the parable of not the Thankful Samaritan this time but of the Good Samaritan.

Let me read to you briefly the story of the Good Samaritan out of Luke 10: 30-37: "And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

"And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

"And likewise a Levite [who]... was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed...on the other side.

"But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,

"And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

"And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

"Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

"And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and

do thou likewise."

Here we have a story of a man who was beaten, robbed, and left half-dead. First, the priest, a church leader, passes by and ignores him. Then, the Levite, a temple worker, passes by and ignores him. And, finally, it's the Samaritan—the low-class, despised-of-the-Jews person—who binds up his wounds, takes him to get medical assistance, and provides him with money. This is the very essence of charity. So, just as the Lord commands us to develop gratitude by keeping the commandments, I think what he's trying to teach us in the parable of the Good Samaritan is that we develop charity by what we do.

We develop charity by our action, by our work, and by our own personal sacrifice. It's not just a verbal thing; it's a doing thing. As we reflect on this, we can see it in the Savior's own life. He spent his whole life going about doing good continually, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and preaching the good word of God. Moreover, the Savior's ultimate act of charity, of course, was the Atonement when he voluntarily took upon Himself all of mankind's sins, all the transgressions, and indeed, all the shortcomings and disappointments that we experience in our lives.

There's another lesson to be drawn from this parable. We have a special injunction to pay attention to those among us who are poor and sick and afflicted and to do it in a non-judgmental way. King Benjamin reminded us in the Book of Mormon that we are all beggars before God (see Mosiah 4:19) and that we have a special responsibility before God to take care of the poor and afflicted.

I want to illustrate the concept of charity by telling a personal story here, if I can get it out without being too emotional. It's about my own father. This is a story of when I was growing up in Idaho Falls, Idaho. I don't know if you've ever been up there in the wintertime around Christmas, but it is a brutally cold and windy place. One Christmas my mother was suffering from rheumatic fever, which is a debilitating disease that can lay you down for weeks at a time. A doctor had told her that she was to rest in bed for two or three weeks while she tried to work her way through this illness. The problem was that she had three kids under the age of six running around the house and it was just a few weeks before Christmas. We were a lower, middle class-income family. My dad, basically, was a foreman working on a sheep ranch. We didn't have a lot of money, but he decided he would give my mother a break. He would take us kids to the Arctic Circle, which was the only fast-food place in town in Idaho Falls in the 1950s. I can remember very vividly that we drove up to the parking lot and noticed that there was a vagrant, a homeless person, going through the trash of the Arctic Circle looking for food. The other thing that made this very unusual—of

course, we'd never seen anything like a person hunting for food amid the trash— was that this was a man of color. He was black. I'm sure that growing up in Idaho I had never seen a black person in my life up until that point. I was quite curious, but I also remember feeling a sense of shame and a kind of embarrassment that a person would be in that position. We just sat there—me and my sister and my brother—and watched the scene unfold in front of us. My dad, without saying a word—and it's still very touching to me— got out of the car, went over and tapped the guy on the shoulder, and had a brief conversation with him. I could also see he was handing over our meal money to this guy. Dad got back in the car, and without saying a word to us, drove home. We went without dinner that night.

As kids we never talked about this. But years later in college, I was in a creative writing class with my sister who was about 17 months younger than I. We were given an assignment to read and write about a short story that illustrated charity. We both, independently, wrote about this story of our Dad and the homeless man. It was a very significant example of charity that had stayed with us all those years.

What I'd like to challenge you to do is to look for ways, as you come up to this holiday season, to practice this kind of charity in your lives.

I'd like to conclude with one final story. At the holidays we talk about gratitude at Thanksgiving and we talk about charity at Christmastime. Obviously, these are virtues that we want to develop all through the year not just during the holiday season. As you sit down for your Thanksgiving dinner in a few weeks, remember the way the Lord has asked us to show gratitude to Him is by keeping His commandments. I would like you to reflect upon a story that may help you remember the importance of keeping the commandments as a measure of gratitude.

Some years ago I was an advisor with the Young Men in the priest's quorum. There was a story in one of our manuals that was taken from a climbing magazine, of all things; but it made a real impact on me. There was a man who was climbing with some of his friends, and they were climbing the big mountains. These are the 20,000-foot mountains that are in the Himalayas. They were at a point in a climb where they were all hooked up with their ropes and any mistake by any of them could result, because of the high altitude, in death. This was a very high-risk type of activity. In any event, I can't remember all the details of the story except that the person who was telling the story had slipped and fell into a crevasse. The day was fading, the light was going, the terrible cold was coming, and it would have been a very easy thing for his friend to just leave him for lost. But, at great danger and risk to his own personal safety, his friend went down into the

crevasse and somehow hauled him out of the crevasse and got him down the mountain. As the saved man was relating this experience in this climbing magazine, he made this rather profound statement. He said, "You know, when Christmas comes along, I always think, 'What do I get for my friend who saved my life?'" He continued, "Do I get him another piece of climbing rope? What can I possibly give him that would signify how grateful I am that he risked his life to save mine?" And then he made this remark: "I still exchange gifts with him. But you know, there isn't a day that goes by when I don't think of him. And that's the gift I give him, is that I think of him and what he did for me." As you think about this story, I want you to reflect upon the sacramental promise that we make every week—that we think about the Savior and the Atonement, that when we do "always remember him and keep his commandments," we can have his Spirit to be with us. (See D&C 20:77)

The Savior literally gave His life for every person here—every one of us—so that we could be resurrected; so that we could repent and return to our Father in Heaven; so that despite all of the travail and disappointments, the challenges that take their toll on us, we could be made whole and happy. He did that for all of us. And, what He asks us to do by way of gratitude is to always remember Him. And we do that by keeping His commandments.

Now, to conclude the subject of charity, I'd like to give you a challenge this coming Christmas season to listen intently to the Holy Ghost that is with all of you. As you listen to the Holy Ghost, I can promise you that you will get impressions about how you can help other people. It may not be a real dramatic thing. It may be something as simple as listening to another individual, giving them a pat on the back, giving them an encouraging word, helping them with their homework—just some manner of reaching out to those around you under the prompting of the Holy Ghost. I can promise you that if you will not ignore these impressions when they come, and they will come, you will in turn get more impressions, more revelation from the Holy Ghost on how you can reach out through acts of charity and help those people around you. I can promise you also that as you act on these impressions and as you do more acts of charity, you will become a charitable person. You will become more Christlike. You will have achieved what is the greatest virtue of all, to have within you at all times the pure love of Jesus Christ, which is charity.

And that's my prayer for all of us as we work to improve ourselves here upon the earth, and I do so in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.