

LDS Business College Forum

“Charity—the Pure Love of Christ” by Karen Peterson

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Even God does not propose to judge man until the end of his days. Why should you and I? Ben Franklin said, “I will speak ill of no man, and speak all the good I know of everybody.” In his book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Dale Carnegie writes this: “In dealing with people, let us remember that we are not dealing with creatures of logic. We are dealing with creatures of emotion, creatures bristling with prejudice and motivated by pride and vanity. Any fool can criticize, condemn and complain, and most fools do. But it takes character and self-control to be understanding and forgiving.”

Carnegie suggests that instead of criticizing other people for what they do, we would be better served to try to figure out *why* they do what they do. It’s possible that if we were in their same place, we might not be so different. Abraham Lincoln said, “I will judge no man until I have walked in his footsteps.”

I believe that all any of us want is to be happy. Sometimes, because of circumstances, people get discouraged, get lonely, and they begin to grasp at momentary opportunities for happiness, no matter how temporary that might be. And they don’t understand at that time that happiness and joy are very, very different things. Satan knows that we are most vulnerable when we are discouraged, and that’s when he will strike us hardest.

If we can remember this, it will help us be more understanding of people who are not living the way we are living. It should give us a sense of responsibility. And instead of stepping on those people who are down, it should give us the desire to help lift them up, and to make them believe in themselves and in their ability to live the gospel.

There are people who have turned away from even suicide because they found just one person for whom they mattered. I know a woman who has fallen so far away from the Church that she believes there is no way for her to ever come back. She believes that her sins are so great that forgiveness is simply not possible. If she ever decides that it is

possible for her, I hope and I pray that those of us around her would be there to help her learn how to believe in herself and her ability to be part of the flock of Christ once again.

Alma tells us in the Book of Mormon that “wickedness never was happiness.” (Alma 41:10) And it never was, and it never will be. And we know this. But this poor lady that I talked about, she is an example of what happens when we get too far away from the Spirit. I remember a bishop telling us once that when we feel the pain, the tremendous pain of guilt, we need to rejoice—because if we still feel guilt, there’s some part of the Spirit that’s still there. It’s when the guilt is gone that we know that the Spirit has left us. And I think that’s very powerful.

Adam fell, but remember that he fell forward. And wasn’t Corianton a better person after his repentance? And remember the story of Alma, who had so much repenting to do. Many times the lesson one learns during repentance can make him or her stronger than before the person fell. What did Jesus do when the woman accused of adultery was brought to him? He merely said, “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.” (See John 8:7) And the people walked away one by one, and when they were all gone, Jesus forgave the woman. And he told her to sin no more.

A bishop once told his congregation, “I cannot tell you why people sin, but I can tell you how to help them desire repentance. Love them back into the fold. Just love them back into the fold.”

By gossiping, condemning, and scorning the sinner, we only drive that person farther away. I believe that you and I will have to account for those people whom we do drive away. We don’t know who is looking at us, who is watching us. We don’t know who is patterning their lives after us. But I think we will be accountable for the example we set.

One of the phrases we most commonly use in our prayers is “forgive us of our sins.” But the Lord will not forgive us unless we forgive others. He has told us, “And now, my brethren, seeing that ye know the light by which ye may judge, which light is the light of Christ, see that ye do not judge wrongfully; for with that same judgment which ye judge ye shall also be judged.” (Moroni 7:18)

I think that, as Latter-day Saints, we often misplace our values. We become so busy with the little details of the gospel that we lose perspective. We forget that although obeying the Word of Wisdom, attending sacrament meeting, going to the temple and so

on—these things are essential to our salvation—but alone, they will not get us back into the kingdom of our Father. We must be good Christians before we can ever be good Latter-day Saints. Just as one would not attempt to build a house without first preparing the foundation, neither can we be the best Latter-day Saints we can be if we are not first good Christians, unless our behavior is Christlike.

I heard a talk in a singles ward many years ago that has always stayed with me. It was a recent convert to the Church, and he told us that he had fourteen contacts with LDS people before he found one who made him desire to learn more about the gospel. He always felt that “if they’re not living their gospel, why would I want to be part of it? It must not matter.” Finally, there was a contact with a person who lived the gospel and shared it and presented him to the missionaries. And what a blessing in his life.

Of all the commandments, the one most emphasized is “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

“This is the first and great commandment.

“And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

“On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 22:37-40)

Another thing to remember is that we must be sincere in our love of our fellowmen. It is not enough to appear to be sincere. Many of the greatest wrongs have been committed by people who appeared to be sincere. Two 15th century philosophers are said to have had this conversation: What is a good man? Simply, one whose life is useful to the world. And a bad man is simply one whose life is harmful to the world. There are, however, those men who are harmful and yet enjoy a good reputation, who manage to profit by a show of usefulness and right and righteousness. These are the worst men of all.”

Brothers and sisters, Christlike behavior involved much more than forgiving and accepting those who are not living the gospel. It involves the way we treat people in general. Human beings have a tendency to select friends who are similar to themselves, and to avoid those who are different. Think about that. Some people are particularly unkind to those who are less fortunate, or who don’t have desirable physical appearance or personality traits. Making fun of or belittling the unfortunate or the misfit can be

equated in my mind to kicking someone while he is down. It is totally un-Christlike and indicates a personal character that lacks compassion and respect for all of God's children.

This last week, as I have been thinking about my talk, I found myself assessing my own personal character and thinking about how Christlike I am. I gave myself good marks in some areas, and not so good marks in others. It occurred to me that I am very kind to the underdog and the less fortunate, probably because while I was in elementary and junior high school, I considered myself to be one of them. So I am very nice to them.

I decided that I do okay in the area of managing my temper, and not lashing out at people when they upset me. Maybe this is because I was raised in a household where that type of behavior was simply not acceptable. While I don't lose my temper or yell or demean others, I have often been guilty of expressing my anger or frustration behind the person's back. And you know it always gets back to the other person. Is it any less hurtful to hear something negative second- or third-hand than it is to have said it to their face? Said it to your face? I've been working on this for a long time, and I'm much better. But I'm not there yet.

While I was doing this self-assessment, I had kind of an epiphany. Do you like that word, Glen? Glen is a word master. I had a new realization that just popped into my consciousness without any warning. I can be an unfriendly person. That is not Christlike.

Now, in the Dean of Students office, and in the classroom, and with my coworkers, I am very much an extrovert. I'm comfortable with the situation, I'm eager to be with these people—you people. And I'm at ease with many of the people in my neighborhood and many of the people at Church. The problem comes when I am around people I don't know. Because by nature I am an introvert, extroverting myself is very exhausting for me when I'm with people I don't know. At a ward banquet, I always say to Glen, "Let's sit by people we know." And he always says, "No. Let's sit by people we don't know, so that we can become acquainted with them." And then I think, "Oh, it's going to be a long night." Because making that small talk is so difficult for me, it just exhausts me.

Well, let's look at me at the bus stop, or on a bus or an airplane. I cannot get my nose into the book fast enough, because that's the message "I'm busy; don't bother me." How

busy can you be on an airplane? But it's just more relaxing if I don't have to be with strangers and make conversation.

The realization that I'm not always friendly has startled me. It has humbled me. It is not Christlike. I need to make some serious changes in my behavior. Elder Russell Nelson said, "While we are free to choose, we are forever tied to the consequences of our choice."

Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared with what lies within us." What is within you? Is it Christlike? What is within me? Is it Christlike?

Learning to be Christlike comes with maturity. Jeffrey Holland had a comment to make about the youth of Zion who are still maturing. He said, "Many students have not yet made the connection between what they say, what they believe, and what they live." It's incorporating our belief into our actions.

Now in my critical thinking class, I assign my students, for their midterm to read the prophet's book *Standing for Something* and then to go back to Chapter Two of our textbook which talks about ideal values versus real values. And then their job for the midterm is to write a paper in which they assess where they are on those virtues that the prophet discusses. Because in Chapter Two of the text, it says: "You can have an ideal value, but if it isn't part of you so that you do it without thinking almost, it's not a real value yet." So I asked the students to put themselves somewhere on a continuum of one to ten how real is that value. We may say that we value chastity. But if we are not chaste, it is not a real value yet. And the same with loving our fellowmen. We can say that we do, and that we know that we should, but if we are not doing it, it's not a real value yet.

When Christ was giving the Sermon on the Mount, he said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...."

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."

(Matthew 5:3-9)

It seems that God has no room in his kingdom for the proud, the vain, or the hypocrite. In Luke he tells this parable: “Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

“The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

“I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all I possess.

“And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

“I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”
(Luke 18:10-14)

As great a man as was Socrates, he had this to say about himself: “Only one thing I know, and that is I know nothing.” The more we learn, the more we realize how much more there is to learn. It’s like coming to realize that leaving college is not the end of our education; it is only the beginning. We are lifelong learners. We will realize that in college we have only received just a peek into all of these areas of knowledge, and everything else is up to us to learn.

Socrates knew that. Whenever we think we know it all, we are wrong. I told my granddaughter, “I’m so proud of you, taking ballet lessons and learning to do ballet.” She’s four. She says, “I already know how to do ballet.” Are we ever like that? “I already know how to do that.” No, if we’re humble, if we’re Christlike, we always know that we need to be taught, and have our spirits in that teachable mode where we know we don’t know everything.

Now the importance of charity can’t be overemphasized. The Book of Mormon and the Bible both spend considerable time talking about charity. “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

“And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

“And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

“And charity suffereth long, and is kind; and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

“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 [will] be well with him.” (Moroni 7:45-47)

You have heard this poem many times, but it reminds us that every soul has value and that we must never give up on anything because everyone can be brought back. Everyone can be made to belong. Everyone can know the joy of being in a Christlike environment, and to become Christlike themselves.

*‘Twas battered and scarred, and the auctioneer
Thought it scarcely worth his time
To spend much time on the old violin
But he held it up with a smile.*

*What am I bidden, good people, he cried
Who’ll start the bidding for me?
A dollar, a dollar, now two, only two?
Two dollars and who’ll make it three?
Three dollars once, three dollars twice,
And going for three...but no.
From the room, far back, a grey-haired man
Came forward and picked up the bow.
And wiping the dust from the old violin,
And tightening the loose strings,*

*He played a melody pure and sweet
As sweet as an angel sings.*

*The music ceased, and the auctioneer
In a voice that was quiet and low, said
What am I bid for the old violin?
And he held it up with the bow.
A thousand dollars, and who'll make it two?
Two thousand and who'll make it three?
Three thousand once, three thousand twice,
And going and gone, said he.*

*The people cheered, but some of them cried
We do not quite understand.
What changed its worth?
Swift came the reply:
'Twas the touch of the master's hand.*

*And many a man with life out of tune
And battered and scarred with sin
Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd
Much like the old violin.
A mess of pottage, a glass of wine,
A game, and he travels on.
He's going once, he's going twice,
He's going, and almost gone.
But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd
Can never quite understand
The worth of a soul, or the change that's wrought
By the touch of the Master's hand.*

(The Touch of the Master's Hand, by Myra Brooks Welch)

Sometimes, the Master is the Savior. Or it might be you. Or it might be me. Is this opportunity something we will pass by? This opportunity to lift a soul in need; to befriend a person in need of acceptance. To climb your success ladder—professionally and personally—ethically, being fair and square, and not stepping on anybody on your way up. People will watch. People will see. People will measure their behavior against your example. We just don't know for whom we are role models. What if that example leads them the wrong way? What if the direction we're modeling is away from righteousness rather than toward it?

When I was in high school, there was a boxer, an LDS boxer named Gene Fulmer. And he won a championship, for the middleweight. He came to a fireside at our stake, and he closed his talk with this prayer, and I went up to him and asked for a copy. So I've had this many, many years, and I like it. It's called "The Athlete's Prayer," but I think it applies to all of us in whatever we're doing in life, and I would like to share it with you.

Dear God,

Help me to be a sport in this game of life. I don't ask for an easy place in the lineup; play me anywhere you need me. I only ask for the stuff to give you one hundred percent of what I've got. If all the hard drives come my way, I thank you for the compliment. Help me to remember that you won't ever let anything happen to me that you and I together can't handle. And help me to take the bad breaks as part of the game.

Help me to remember that the game is full of knots, and knocks and trouble, and make me thankful for them. Help me to get so that the harder they come, the better I like it. And dear Lord, help me always to play on the square. No matter what the other fellow did, help me to come clean. Help me to study the books so I'll know the rules, and study and think about the Greatest Player that ever lived. If He found that the best part of the game was in helping the person who was out

of luck, help me to find out, too. Help me to be a regular fellow with the other fellows.

Finally, dear Lord, if fate seems to uppercut me with both hands, and I'm laid on the shelf with sickness or old age or something else, help me to take that as part of the game too. Help me not to whimper or squeal that the game was a frame-up or that I had a raw deal. Amen.

It is my prayer, brothers and sisters, that you and I will each look at ourselves and look deeply into our behaviors, and determine to what extent our behaviors and our attitudes are Christlike. And where they are not, let's go to work. And I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.