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The Essence of Discipleship

When love becomes the guiding principle in our care for others, our service to them becomes the gospel in action.

From the beginning of time, the Lord has taught that to become His people we need to be of one heart and one mind.¹ The Savior also explained that the two great commandments in the law are “Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” and “love thy neighbour as thyself.”² Lastly, soon after the Church was restored, the Lord commanded the Saints to “visit the poor and the needy and administer to their relief.”³

What is the common theme in all these commandments? It is that we must love one another and serve one another. This is, in fact, the essence of discipleship in the true Church of Jesus Christ.

As we celebrate 75 years of the Church welfare program, we are reminded of the purposes of welfare, which are to help members help themselves become self-reliant, to care for the poor and needy, and to give service. The Church has organized its resources to assist members to provide for the physical, spiritual, social, and emotional well-being of themselves, their families, and others. The office of bishop carries with it a

special mandate to care for the poor and needy and to administer such resources for the members in his ward. He is assisted in his efforts by priesthood quorums, Relief Society, and in particular, home and visiting teachers.

Relief Society has always been at the heart of welfare. When the Prophet Joseph Smith organized the Relief Society in 1842, he said to the women, “This is the beginning of better days to the poor and needy.”⁴ He told the sisters that the purpose of the society was “relief of the poor, the destitute, the widow and the orphan, and for the exercise of all benevolent purposes. . . . They will pour in oil and wine to the wounded heart of the distressed; they will dry up the tears of the orphan and make the widow’s heart to rejoice.”⁵

He also stated that the society “might provoke the brethren to good works in looking to the wants of the poor—searching after objects of charity, and in administering to their wants—to assist by correcting the morals and strengthening the virtues of the community.”⁶

Men and women of the Church

participate jointly today in bringing relief to those in need. Priesthood holders provide essential support for those needing spiritual guidance and help. Inspired home teachers bless lives and provide the blessings of the gospel to every family unit. In addition, they lend their strength and talents in other ways, such as helping a family in need of home repairs, in helping a family move, or in helping a brother find needed employment.

Relief Society presidents visit homes to assess the needs for a bishop. Inspired visiting teachers watch over and care for sisters and families. They are often the first response in times of immediate need. Relief Society sisters provide meals, render compassionate service, and give constant support during times of trial.

Church members all over the world have rejoiced in the past and should rejoice now at the opportunities we have to serve others. Our combined efforts bring relief to those who are poor, hungry, suffering, or distressed, thereby saving souls.

Every bishop has available to him the Lord’s storehouse, which is established as “faithful members give to the bishop of their time, talents, skills, compassion, materials, and financial means in caring for the poor and in building up the kingdom of God on the earth.”⁷ We can all contribute to the Lord’s storehouse when we pay our fast offerings and make all our resources available to the bishop to assist those in need.

Despite the rapidly changing world, welfare principles have not changed with the passing of time because they are divinely inspired, revealed truth. When members of the Church and their families do everything they can to sustain themselves and still cannot



meet basic needs, the Church stands ready to help. Short-term needs are met immediately, and a plan to help the recipient become self-reliant is established. Self-reliance is the ability to provide the spiritual and temporal necessities of life for self and family.

As we increase our own level of self-reliance, we increase our ability to help and serve others the way the Savior did. We follow the Savior's example when we minister to the needy, the sick, and the suffering. When love becomes the guiding principle in our care for others, our service to them becomes the gospel in action. It is the gospel in its finest moment. It is pure religion.

In my various Church assignments, I have been humbled by the love and concern bishops and Relief Society leaders demonstrate for their flocks. While I was serving as a stake Relief Society president in Chile during the early 1980s, the country was experiencing a deep recession and the rate of unemployment was 30 percent. I

witnessed how heroic Relief Society presidents and faithful visiting teachers went about "doing good"⁸ under such grim circumstances. They portrayed the scripture in Proverbs 31:20: "She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy."

Sisters whose families had very little themselves were constantly helping those who they thought were in greater need. I then more clearly understood what the Savior saw when He declared in Luke 21:3–4:

"Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all:

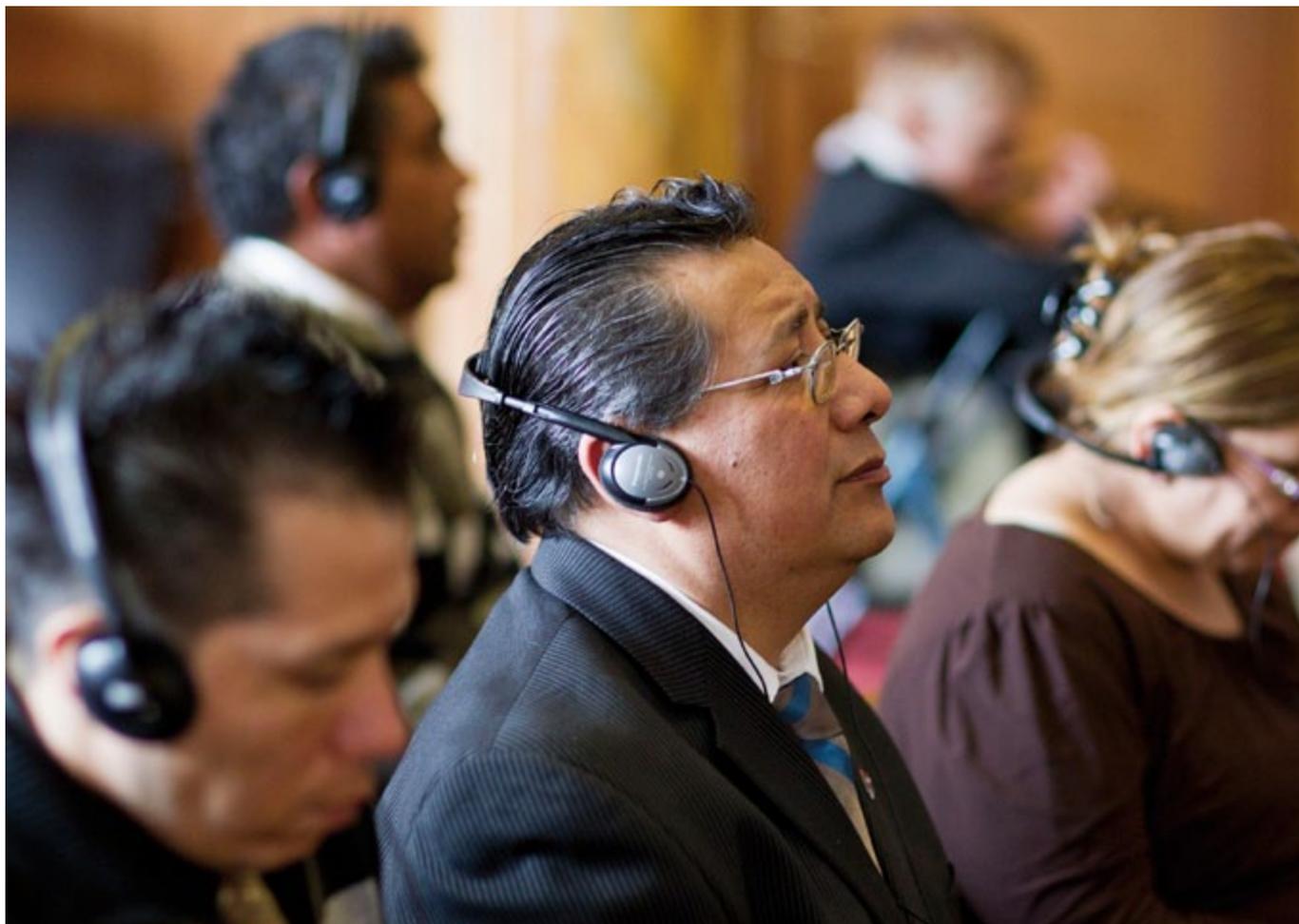
"For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had."

A few years later I witnessed the same thing as a stake Relief Society president in Argentina when hyperinflation hit the country and the economic collapse that followed affected many of our faithful

members. I witnessed it yet again during my recent visits to Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Antananarivo in Madagascar, and Bulawayo in Zimbabwe. Ward members everywhere, and Relief Society sisters in particular, continue to build faith, strengthen individuals and families, and help those in need.

To think that a humble sister or brother with a Church calling can go into a home where there is poverty, sorrow, sickness, or distress and can bring peace, relief, and happiness is astonishing. No matter where the ward or branch is or how big or small the group is, every member throughout the world has that opportunity. It happens every day, and it is happening somewhere at this very moment.

Karla is a young mother of two. Her husband, Brent, works long hours and commutes an hour each way to work. Soon after the birth of their second little girl, she related the following experience: "The day after I received the call to serve as a



counselor in my ward Relief Society, I began to feel quite overwhelmed. How could I possibly take on the responsibility to help care for the women in my ward when I was struggling just to fulfill my role as a wife and mother of a very active two-year-old and a new baby? Just as I was dwelling on these feelings, the two-year-old became sick. I wasn't quite sure what to do for her and care for the baby at the same time. Just then, Sister Wasden, who is one of my visiting teachers, unexpectedly came to the door. A mother of grown children, she knew just what to do to help. She told me what I needed to do while she went to the drug-store to get some supplies. Later on she arranged for my husband to be picked up at the train station so that he could get home quickly to help me. Her response to what I believe was a prompting from the Holy Ghost along with her willingness to

serve me were just the reassurance I needed from the Lord that He was going to help me to fulfill my new calling.”

Heavenly Father loves us and knows our unique circumstances and abilities. Although we seek His help daily through prayer, it is usually through another person that He meets our needs.⁹

The Lord said, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”¹⁰

The pure love of Christ is expressed as we give selfless service. Helping one another is a sanctifying experience which exalts the receiver and humbles the giver. It helps us become true disciples of Christ.

The welfare plan has always been the application of eternal principles of the gospel. It truly is providing in the Lord's way. Let us each renew our desire to be part of the Lord's storehouse in blessing others.

I pray that the Lord will bless each of us with a greater sense of mercy, charity, and compassion. I plead for an increase in our desire and ability to reach out and assist the less fortunate, the distressed, and those who suffer, that their needs may be met, that their faith may be strengthened, and that their hearts may be filled with gratitude and love.

May the Lord bless each one of us as we walk in obedience to His commandments, His gospel, and His light. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. See Moses 7:18.
2. See Matthew 22:36–40.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 44:6.
4. Joseph Smith, in *History of the Church*, 4:607.
5. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 452.
6. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 452.
7. *Providing in the Lord's Way: A Leader's Guide to Welfare* (1990), 11.
8. Acts 10:38; Articles of Faith 1:13.
9. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* (2006), 82.
10. John 13:35.