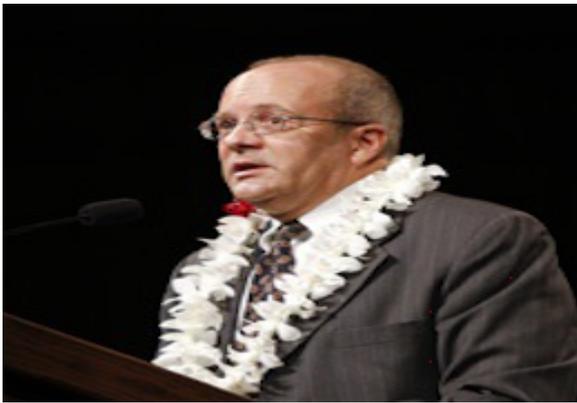


## A Giving Heart



Kent P. Jackson  
Professor of Ancient Scripture  
Joseph Smith Lecture  
November 15, 2011

Joseph Smith said that he had "no enmity against any one." • If we would secure and cultivate the love of others, we must love others, even our enemies as well as friends.

Sectarian priests cry out concerning me, and ask, "Why is it this babblers gains so many followers, and retains them?" • I answer, It is because I possess the principle of love. All I can offer the world is a good heart and a good hand.

The Saints can testify whether I am willing to lay down my life for my brethren. If it has been demonstrated that I have been willing to die for a "Mormon," • I am bold to declare before Heaven that I am just as ready to die in defending the rights of a Presbyterian, a Baptist, or a good man of any other denomination. . . .

If I esteem mankind to be in error, shall I bear them down? No. I will lift them up." • (History of the Church 5:498-99)

From time to time, I have asked people to tell me, Who is the most Christ-like person you know? Not always, but most often, the answer will be a mother or grandmother, or less frequently, a father or grandfather. I have learned the reason for answers like these. We tend to see Christ-like attributes in those who most immediately bless our lives. Mothers and grandmothers, perhaps more than others, sacrifice and give in our behalf. We associate with them the idea of giving, and we recognize that we have been the recipients of their kindness. The quality that they exemplify is what I call "a giving heart." • The scriptures call it "the pure love of Christ" • (Moroni 7:47). Good people tend to love people with giving hearts, people who have an inclination to share and reach out to help and bless others. In contrast, all people generally try to avoid those they consider to be self-centered and ungenerous.

You may recall the story of the Grinch who stole Christmas. It is a story of a thoroughly unlikable character who lives only for himself, avoids contact with others, and is in a constant state of ill humor just to spite the rest of the world. The rest of the world, however, is not affected by his attitude. Others pay no attention to him and go about their affairs: which, of course, makes the Grinch even more disagreeable. His problem, we are told, is that his heart is "two sizes too small." • He didn't need to be that way and wasn't always like that. I suspect that he became who he was through a steady diet of greed, pettiness, and self-interest. As President Spencer W.

Kimball taught, selfishness "snare the soul, shrinks the heart, and darkens the mind" • (Ensign, May 1978, 81). Contrast that description with the giving hearts of the people you love and who love you.

Having a giving heart is not just a good thing to do to get along with others, it is a doctrinal imperative, and it is at the core of our religion.

In the scriptures, we learn that God has a giving heart. He told Moses, "This is my work and my glory: to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" • (Moses 1:39). Because He loves us, He wants us to grow in spirituality and happiness, and He has set in place the means by which we can do it. "He has power," • Joseph Smith stated, "to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences" • us "that they may be exalted with himself" • (Teachings, 354). Jesus said, "In my Father's house are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" • (John 14:2-3?).

What kind of a being is this, our God, whose very work and glory consist of lifting us, "the weaker intelligences," • so we can share in the glory that is His? What kind of a Savior is Jesus Christ, who descended below all things and suffered and died in our behalf so that where He is, we can be also? Revelation tells us that the reward for the faithful will be "all that [the] Father hath" • (D&C 84:38?)?, indeed, "the riches of eternity" • (D&C 38:39). What kind of God is this who wants to give us everything?

God is, in fact, the being of the ultimate giving heart. And because that is how He is, we also must learn to have giving hearts. Our natural instinct is to possess, and to protect, what we think is ours. But the gospel teaches us how to change our natural instincts, and the scriptures contain many lessons that help us learn how. For example, when Jesus told His listeners about the giving heart of the Good Samaritan, He concluded with "Go, and do thou likewise" • (Luke 10:37). King Benjamin, who lived a life of service, taught us how people with giving hearts treat their fellowmen: "Ye yourselves will succor those that stand in need of your succor; ye will administer of your substance unto him that standeth in need; and ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition to you in vain, and turn him out to perish" • (Mosiah 4:16).

But people with giving hearts do even better: "Perhaps thou shalt say," • King Benjamin continued, "the man has brought upon himself his misery; therefore I will stay my hand, and will not give unto him of my food, nor impart unto him of my substance that he may not suffer, for his punishments are just." • Our natural instinct may be to speak like that, but King Benjamin warns us that to do so is wrong. He asks: "Are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same Being, even God, for all the substance which we have, for both food and raiment, and for gold, and for silver, and for all the riches which we have of every kind?" • (Mosiah 4:17-19).

Jesus taught the same principle when He gave his great parable of the dividing of the sheep from the goats on the day of judgment. When He comes and gathers all nations before him, He will place the righteous on one side and the unrighteous on the other. To the righteous, He will say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me." • The righteous will ask, When did we do these things? His response cuts to the core of our obligation to others: "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" • (Matthew 25:31-40).

I am intrigued by what Jesus chose in this parable to make the ultimate test for whether we are worthy to enter His kingdom. Perhaps we can think of many things required of us: good things that show our obedience and our faith. But in this particular lesson, our judgment will be based on how we treat others, particularly those who can be called "the least" • among us. This will be the test of who we really are; it is the test of the giving heart.

Membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the ideal training ground for those who desire to develop a giving heart. I believe that this is one of the purposes of the Church. Consider, for example, the payment of tithes and offerings.

Faithful Latter-day Saints pay their tithing. They give one tenth of their income to the Church, which enables the Church to meet its earthly obligations and fulfill its divine mission.

But what does tithing do for those who pay it? King Benjamin said that we are all beggars, and that we depend on God for all we have: food, clothing, and all our material possessions. We might be tempted to think that the things we possess are ours, but the Lord has said, "Thou shalt not covet thine own property" • (D&C 19:26). We might think that we earned our possessions through our labors. But our capacity to labor is likewise a gift from God. The faithful payment of tithes is a reminder that all that we have is the Lord's and that we are His stewards with it. God's love and wisdom are evident in that He entrusts us with the remaining 90 percent to meet our needs and to bless the lives of others. "The riches of the earth are mine to give," • He said, but we must "beware of pride" • as we use them (D&C 38:39). We learn to have giving hearts when we gladly pay our tithing.

I was reminded of the transforming power of paying tithing many years ago when I was helping missionaries teach the gospel to a young family. After the missionaries explained the principle of tithing and told the family that once they were baptized, they would give 10 percent of their income to the Church, the husband said resolutely: "It's not fair." • I was startled and saddened by his answer. Then he continued. "It's not fair. God gives us everything we have. We give him a meager 10 percent in return, and then what does he do? He blesses us more. We can never pay God back for what he has done for us. It's not fair." • Those words were evidence of a giving heart that comes from embracing the blessing of paying tithing.

In the Church, we also pay fast offerings. On the first Sunday of each month, members fast for a day. When they fast, "they are asked to give to the Church a fast offering at least equal to the value of the food they would have eaten. If possible, they should be generous and give more" • (Church Handbook of Instructions, 35). This money is used strictly to meet the needs of poor people. Bishops dispense the money as needed within their own congregations or send it to Church headquarters where it can be allocated for people in need elsewhere.

Fast offerings bless those who give by providing them an opportunity to help others. Donated funds go to those who are hungry and in need of food, thirsty and in need of drink, strangers in need of being taken in, and naked and in need of clothing. What better service could there be to help others and to develop in ourselves a giving heart?

Another way that Church membership trains us to have giving hearts is through accepting and serving in callings. I don't know of any organization that operates like our church, in which the work is accomplished by unpaid but willing members who accept callings to serve. Think about what makes this system unique. There are many organizations in the world that use volunteers. But when we serve in Church callings, we aren't really volunteers. We don't pick our assignments, other people do. We don't seek them out or request them. In other aspects of our lives, we make choices; we can choose our friends, place of residence, and employment. But in Church callings, others decide where our talents might best be utilized, they inform us where they would like us to serve, and they ask us to do it. This makes serving in Church callings a unique part of our lives.

What if you are called to do something you never wanted to do? What if you are called to do something you feel you have no talent to do? Or, what if you feel your bishop wasn't particularly inspired in the calling he selected for you? In any of those cases, the success of your service will depend on the quality of your giving heart. You will find, as I have, that even under these circumstances, you will succeed in your calling, you will know that it is what the Lord wants you to do, and you will learn to love it. Your willingness to serve will help you develop a

giving heart.

Some of the gifts we receive or give are costly and others less so. But what makes them meaningful is not the expense but the degree to which they reflect the love of the giver. Jesus, you'll recall, made the widow's mite the standard, not the lavish gifts of the rich people (see Mark 12:41-44). When I was young and not very wise, I gave my wife things like frying pans and kitchen utensils for Christmas. Earlier this year, our neighbor gave his wife a lawn edger for her birthday. My favorite present is one I receive each Father's Day. Many years ago, my children began drawing pictures of me for Father's Day. This is now continued by my grandchildren. It is one of the highlights of my year to see them run in our door eager to show me the portraits they have drawn of me. These priceless pieces of art are evidence of giving hearts that children exemplify best.

Do you remember our friend the Grinch? When he came to a realization that his life of selfishness was of no use to him, he changed. His heart grew three sizes, making it in the end a size bigger than normal. That is what we want of our own giving hearts.

Mormon teaches that we should pray to have the capacity to love as Christ does. "Pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart," • he said, "that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ" • (Moroni 7:48). This is the pure love of Christ, a giving heart. Joseph Smith teaches what will happen when we have love in our hearts: "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" • (History of the Church, 4:227). I am a witness of the power of these words. I have found that when I have prayed for opportunities to serve others, the Lord has heard and answered my prayers. He has both given me opportunities to serve, and he has given me a portion of his love to do so. All around us there are people with needs. I hope you will follow Mormon's admonition and extend your giving hearts to them.

I have seen giving hearts evidenced in many ways, and my life has been blessed repeatedly by others who reflect this God-like quality.

Once I was traveling in Turkey with three fellow Americans and a local driver. I had planned the trip in careful detail. The longest day of our trip involved driving through many miles of mountainous country of small villages and amazing vistas. The last part of that long day was to take us on a sixty-mile road to a hotel near the top of a mountain. We should be there in an hour, we thought. We were already tired when we turned onto that road. We found, to our dismay, that it was no highway at all but a very small road that wound its way up and down mountains. That may sound interesting and beautiful, and indeed it was. But the sun was getting low, and we had already traveled far. We were tired. Soon it became apparent that we would be spending much more time on that road than the hour I had anticipated. It took us three hours to cover the sixty miles, with scarcely a village or building along the way.

Soon it turned into a dirt road. And then the sun went down, and it was pitch black outside.

We finally saw a sign to what we thought was our destination. It pointed to an even smaller dirt road that turned steeply up the mountain. We took that road and went on in the darkness, winding our way up almost four thousand feet, ever higher into what for us was the total unknown.

The men with me were not pleased with my planning for the trip. I felt the emotions that the captain of a ship feels when a mutiny is about to take place.

Yet we went forward. I wish I could say that we went forward because of faith, but that wasn't the case. It was out of fear and desperation, because we didn't have other good options. We were already three hours removed from the nearest town behind us, and we could only take our chances with what lay ahead. We drove up and up

and up, well beyond the last trees, with no signs of any kind of life around us.

Not far from the top of the mountain, the road ended, permanently. There was no road, no parking lot, no hotel, nothing.

Two of us volunteered to walk up the rest of the mountain in the dark, in a vain hope that we would find our hotel on the other side of the peak. As we walked, we saw a light in the distance. Drawing near, we could see that we had arrived at a mountain-top archaeological site, and there was a small shack immediately below it.

You can imagine the surprise of an old man when he saw two total strangers come to his door in the middle of the night in such a remote place. His name was Osman, and he was the caretaker there. He lived alone on the mountain in the little wooden shack. It was about ten by fifteen feet in dimension and had a small coal-burning stove in the middle of the single room. With that stove, Osman kept warm during the cold nights at high elevation, and on it he cooked his meals. He slept on a bench along one of the walls.

With the help of my map, I showed Osman where we had come from and where we thought we were going for our stay in a hotel. With words and hand gestures, he communicated what had already become painfully obvious to us: "You can't get there from here." • To arrive at our hotel, we would have to drive the four thousand feet back down the mountain, then along a remote dirt road for about twenty miles, and back up to the top of the mountain on its other side.

It didn't look good for us.

But Osman had a giving heart. To our surprise, he invited us to spend the night in his cabin. We were deeply touched by the invitation. It was a blessing, to say the least. Our driver was exhausted, we were all short-tempered and traumatized, and we didn't know if we could even find the roads in the dark without driving off a cliff. So we welcomed Osman's generous offer.

As we returned from the car with our fellow travelers, Osman was fixing us a late dinner in a pan on his stove. He threw in whatever he could find in the cabin to feed his five guests. I was touched, again, by the generosity of one who would house and feed total strangers under such odd circumstances.

Between the six of us, we used up every available inch of bench and floor space in the little hut. I got to have a bench to myself. It was hard and only about five feet long and a foot and a half wide. The room was burning hot when we went to bed and freezing cold in the morning, but it was shelter, and it was a place to spend the night in safety and rest.

Our night on the mountain turned out to be one of the most memorable experiences of my life, and one that reminded me of what a blessing it is that there are people in the world who have giving hearts. At the time, my primary reaction was profound relief to have a place to spend the night after such a traumatic drive. But over time, my reaction has gravitated more and more to thankfulness: for Osman and his generosity and for the Lord who led us to him. You see, we were hungry, and he gave us meat; we were thirsty, and he gave us drink; we were strangers, and he took us in. Indeed, that night was probably the only night of my life when I really had no place to stay. I was taken in by a stranger, fed, and housed, and sent on my way in peace the next morning.

A few years later, I had occasion to return to the same location. This time, we took the right road, and we drove it in daylight. I went to the little hut, prepared to greet Osman and remind him of the experience. I was saddened to learn that in the interim, he had passed away. I wish I had thanked him more when I was there the first time. This to me is a reminder that with our giving hearts, we also need to have thankful hearts.

All around us there are people with giving hearts who bless our lives. It is often not until years later that we fully recognize how much they have done for us. I don't know if I ever said "Thank you" • to a school teacher, or to a Primary or Sunday School teacher. I don't know if I ever thanked the bishop who put up with me when I was a teenager, or the bishop who sent me on my mission. And it was only when I became a parent that I realized how much I am in the debt of my own parents. A lifetime of saying "Thank you" • to them would never be enough to acknowledge what they did for me. They, like Jesus and like Osman, were people with giving hearts.

My life is thine, dear Lord,  
According to thy word.  
No longer mine alone,  
Possessed as though my own.

A life of service let me live,  
A light to share, a gift to give.  
Help me at last to see  
What thou hast done for me.  
My soul to bless each day  
With grace along my way.  
A pattern true thou art for me,  
A grateful follower I'll be.

Guide me to find a way  
Some soul to bless today.  
To lift a burden sore,  
To heal and comfort more.  
My blessings come from thee above.  
I'll share them now as gifts of love.

("My Life is Thine," • Kent P. Jackson, © 2011)

That we may have giving hearts is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.