

Gospel Doctrine Lesson 44: Being Good Citizens

LESSON GOAL: To encourage us to be good citizens by participating in government, obeying the law, and strengthening the community.

Article of Faith 12: We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law.

D&C 98:4-10: And now, verily I say unto you concerning the laws of the land, **it is my will that my people should observe to do all things whatsoever I command them.** And that **law of the land** which is constitutional, supporting that principle of freedom in maintaining rights and privileges, **belongs to all mankind**, and is justifiable before me. Therefore, I, the Lord, justify you, and your brethren of my church, in befriending that law which is the constitutional law of the land; And as pertaining to law of man, **whatsoever is more or less than this, cometh of evil. I, the Lord God, make you free**, therefore ye are free indeed; and **the law also maketh you free.** Nevertheless, **when the wicked rule the people mourn.** Wherefore, **honest men and wise men should be sought for diligently**, and good men and wise men ye should observe to uphold; otherwise whatsoever is less than these cometh of evil.

1. Participating in government

In August 1835, a general assembly of the Church at Kirtland, Ohio, unanimously approved a **declaration of beliefs about government. This declaration is recorded in D&C 134.**

The purposes of civil governments:

- a. "For the **good and safety of society**" (D&C 134:1).
- b. "For the **protection of the innocent and the punishment of the guilty**" (D&C 134:6).
- c. "For the **protection of all citizens in the free exercise of their religious belief**" (D&C 134:7).
- d. "For **redress of all wrongs and grievances**" (D&C 134:11).

As we participate in government and political processes, we should do so with the understanding that **"the Church is politically neutral. It does not endorse political parties, platforms, or candidates.** Candidates should not imply that they are endorsed by the Church or its leaders. Church leaders and members should avoid any statements or conduct that might be interpreted as Church endorsement of political parties or candidates" (*Church Handbook of Instructions, Book 2: Priesthood and Auxiliary Leaders* [1998], 325).

Elder L. Tom Perry: "As Church members, we live under the banner of many different flags. How important it is that we understand our place and our position in the lands in which we live! **We should be familiar with the history, heritage, and laws of the lands that govern us.** In those countries that allow us the right to participate in the affairs of government, **we should use our free agency and be actively engaged in supporting and defending the principles of truth, right, and freedom**" (Conference Report, Oct. 1987, 87; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1987, 72).

2. Obeying the laws of the land

D&C 58:21-22: Let no man break the laws of the land, for he that keepeth the laws of God hath no need to break the laws of the land. Wherefore, **be subject to the powers that be**, until he reigns whose right it is to reign, and subdues all enemies under his feet.

D&C 58:26-28: For behold, **it is not meet that I should command in all things**; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward. Verily I say, **men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness**; For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. **And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward.**

3. Strengthening the community

"Members should do their civic duty by supporting measures that strengthen society morally, economically, and culturally. **Members are urged to be actively engaged in worthy causes to improve their communities** and make them wholesome places in which to live and rear families" (*Church Handbook of Instructions, Book 2, page 325*).

"We strongly urge **men and women to be willing to serve** on school boards, city and county councils and commissions, state legislatures, and other high offices of either election or appointment" (First Presidency letter, 15 Jan. 1998).

4. Ideas for community service

Matthew 25:40: 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.**

Health services: Make clothes and food for people who are sick; take care of sick children in a hospital or in your neighborhood; take flowers to patients in hospitals who have no families; on special holidays, remember people who are sick.

Social services: Help organize or lead groups that help youth develop skills; demonstrate sewing, cooking, crafts, or other skills to those in orphanages and community schools or to those who are disabled; read to the elderly in a rest home; teach language skills to those who do not speak your language; read to the blind; visit and talk to elderly people in your own family and neighborhood.

5. Strengthening the community through acts of courtesy

President Gordon B. Hinckley: "It is amazing what courtesy will accomplish. It is tragic what a lack of courtesy can bring. We see it every day as we move in the traffic of the cities in which we live. A moment spent in letting someone else get into the line does good for the one who is helped, and it also does good for the one who helps. **Something happens inside of us when we are courteous and deferential toward others. It is all part of a refining process which, if persisted in, will change our very natures**" (*Conference Report*, Apr. 1996, 70; *Ensign*, May 1996, 49).

WHO DO YOU CHOOSE TO UNSEE?

Lee Tom Perry: "The logic of individual service is that **we discover what someone needs**, then respond to that need using the resources and talents we possess. . . . If a lot of us do a little, even if we have limited time and resources, it adds up to a lot. The descriptions of what ordinary, everyday individuals do to serve others may sound quite ordinary and everyday until we start doing the addition and multiplication. John the Baptist's answer to people who asked him "What shall we do then?" (Luke 3:10) was to do a little, but to definitely do something. A more specific answer would be to provide as much individual service as our individual resources and talents allow" (BYU Devotional, 10/1/1996).

Kevin W. Colton: "And, speaking of Christmas, I am reminded of one of my favorite Christmas stories that illustrates the importance of individual acts of charity in the line of service. I heard it years ago, and although I am not sure of the source or even if it is a factual story, the point is clear.

"It was just a small, white envelope stuck among the branches of our Christmas tree. No name, no identification, no inscription. It has peeked through the branches of our tree for the past 10 years or so. It began because my husband Mike strongly disliked the commercial aspects of Christmas—the frantic running around at the last minute and the focus on gifts instead of people and our Savior. Knowing he felt this way, I reached for something special. The inspiration came in an unusual way. Our son Kevin, who was 12 that year, was wrestling at the junior level. Shortly before Christmas there was a nonleague match against a team sponsored by an inner-city church. These youngsters didn't have headgear, and they dressed in sneakers so ragged that shoestrings seemed to be the only thing holding them together, and they were a sharp contrast to our boys in their spiffy blue and gold uniforms and sparkling new wrestling shoes.

"We took every weight class. Mike, seated beside me, shook his head sadly. "I wish just one of them could have won," he said. "They have a lot of potential, but losing like this could take the heart right out of them."

"Mike loved kids—all kids—having coached Little League football, baseball, and lacrosse. That's when the idea for his present came. That afternoon I went to a local sporting goods store and bought an assortment of wrestling headgear and shoes and sent them anonymously to the inner-city church. On Christmas Eve I placed the envelope on the tree with a note inside telling Mike what I had done and that this was his gift from me.

"His smile was the brightest that year, and in succeeding years. For each Christmas I followed the tradition—one year sending a group of mentally handicapped youngsters to a hockey game, another year a check to a pair of elderly brothers whose home had burned to the ground the week before Christmas, and on and on. The envelope became the highlight of our Christmas. It was always the last thing opened on Christmas morning, and our children, ignoring their new toys, would stand with wide-eyed anticipation as their dad lifted the envelope from the tree to reveal its contents. As the children grew, the toys gave way to more practical presents, but the envelope never lost its allure.

"The story doesn't end there. You see, we lost Mike last year to cancer. When Christmas rolled around I was still so wrapped in grief that I barely got the tree up. But Christmas Eve found me placing an envelope on the tree, and in the morning it was joined by three more. Each of our children, unbeknownst to the others, had placed an envelope on the tree for their dad. The tradition has grown and someday will expand even further with our grandchildren standing around the tree with wide-eyed anticipation watching as their fathers take down the envelope. Mike's spirit, like the Christmas spirit, will always be with us.

I hope that I have made the case for being in the line of service. **But I also want to be realistic. Service is great, but I caution you: It cannot wait for the convenient moment. You need to be proactive. If you wait for the convenient moment to serve, it will never happen! Sacrifice is what makes it service.**

If we are really going to learn to serve, **it must become a way of life.** It must become part of our everyday actions" (In the Line of Service," BYU Devotional, 9 April 2002).

H. Burke Peterson: “In the day-to-day process of living, with all of its trials, challenges, and discouragements, we often underestimate our own God-given attributes and abilities which make it possible for each of us to pattern his or her life after that of the Savior and, in fact, do some of the things he did as he lived here among men. We may never personally experience the miracle of raising the dead, or be one to turn water into wine. We may not be one of thousands who may be fed from a few loaves and fishes, or be a part of the miraculous experience of walking on a stormy sea. But, for each of us, there are a number of Christlike patterns of living we can be part of in our mortal sojourn. A selfless person is one who is more concerned about the happiness and well-being of another than about his or her own convenience or comfort, one who is willing to serve another when it is neither sought for nor appreciated, or one who is willing to serve even those whom he or she dislikes. A selfless person displays a willingness to sacrifice, a willingness to [put aside] personal wants, and needs, and feelings” (“Selflessness: A Pattern for Happiness,” *Ensign*, May 1985, 66).

JoAnn Abeggle: “I often hear the Savior’s words: **“Wilt thou be made whole? Then serve thy brothers and sisters.”** To be like the Savior is to be whole, which implies that we are engaged in acts of selfless service. Selfless service requires personal action, a desire to pick up our beds and walk. It is easy to give away excess money, used equipment, and used clothing. **It is more difficult to give of our time, to give of our personal presence to help others.** There is much beauty and goodness in the world today if we look for it. The evening news tells us that things are not very good and that there is a great deal of sadness. But there is a great deal of beauty in the world” (BYU Devotional, 7/11/06).

Albert Einsterin: “Strange is our situation here upon earth. Each of us comes for a short visit, not knowing why, yet sometimes seeming to a divine purpose. From the standpoint of daily life, however, there is one thing we do know: **that man is here for the sake of other men.** . . . Many times a day I realize **how much my own outer and inner life is built upon the labors of my fellow-men,** both living and dead, and how earnestly I must exert myself in order to give in return as much as I have received. [Albert Einstein, in *Living Philosophies* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1930).

Bonnie D. Parkin: “My daughter-in-law’s mother, Susan, was a wonderful seamstress. President Kimball lived in their ward. One Sunday, Susan noticed that he had a new suit. Her father had recently returned from a trip to New York and had brought her some exquisite silk fabric. Susan thought that fabric would make a handsome tie to go with President Kimball’s new suit. So on Monday she made the tie. She wrapped it in tissue paper and walked up the block to President Kimball’s home. On her way to the front door, she suddenly stopped and thought, “Who am I to make a tie for the prophet? He probably has plenty of them.” Deciding she had made a mistake, she turned to leave.

Just then Sister Kimball opened the front door and said, “Oh, Susan!” Stumbling all over herself, Susan said, “I saw President Kimball in his new suit on Sunday. Dad just brought me some silk from New York. . . and so I made him a tie.” Before Susan could continue, Sister Kimball stopped her, took hold of her shoulders, and said: **“Susan, never suppress a generous thought.”** Susan didn’t have an assignment to make that tie. She wasn’t hired to do so. Despite feeling a bit hesitant, **she did it because it felt right.** Susan had a quiet sense of mission to serve others. “Never suppressing a generous thought” became a part of her *personal* ministry. (“Personal Ministry,” BYU Devotional, 13 February 2006).

Bonnie D. Parkin: **“Most ministering opportunities are spontaneous, not planned in advance.** Much of the Savior’s ministering seemed almost incidental, happening while He was on His way to somewhere else—while He was doing something else. Chapter 9 of the Gospel of Matthew is an amazing illustration of that.

Early in the chapter, the Savior disembarked a ship. A man with palsy was brought to Him. Jesus stopped and healed him. Then Jesus had a discussion with the Pharisees and a man interrupted, saying his daughter had died. So Jesus left to assist the man. On His way, a woman touched His garment. Jesus healed her. He continued on His way and raised the girl from the dead. As He departed her home, two blind men followed Him, and He healed them. As He continued on His way, He cast the devil from a man possessed. **All of this took place in one chapter!** He gave us the example of ministering **as He went**” (“Personal Ministry,” BYU Devotional, 13 February 2006).

Bonnie D. Parkin: “We can become better acquainted with Heavenly Father through prayer. Personal ministry can answer prayers. **We can offer a daily prayer that enlists the help of the Lord Jesus Christ as we ask: “Help me to be the answer to someone’s prayer today.”** The Lord consistently answers this prayer as we tune our eyes and ears to discerning the needs of those around us.

Asking to be an answer to someone’s prayer has a powerful impact. There are sacred, quiet experiences for those who participate with the Lord in answering prayers. As we go about listening, watching, and feeling for the answer to those prayers—even in the midst of our busy schedules—I **testify that our earthly ministry unfolds by revelation and divine empowerment.** Our testimonies, faith, and feelings of connectedness to the Lord expand in unexpected ways.

“And we can increase that participation with the Lord through prayer and even fasting for others. This helps us become aware of the great power the Lord grants us to make a difference for our brothers and sisters. In short, we can initiate and partake in small miracles on behalf of others—miracles that we are uniquely prepared to do, that **only** we can do”

My dear brothers and sisters, we are each called to reach out to others—most of the time it happens through simple acts of kindness, one to one. **Our personal ministry is sacred and precious.** It allows us to become an extension of the Lord’s love. It embraces all who cross our path. **What are those things you can do for another person that only you can do? I invite you to find out**” (“Personal Ministry,” BYU Devotional, 13 February 2006).

Neal A. Maxwell: "Our impact is less likely to emanate from the pulpit—more often it will occur in one-to-one relationships, or in small groups where we can have an impact on an individual" (*A More Excellent Way*, 74).

Dallin H. Oaks: "A great example of unselfish service is the late Mother Teresa of Calcutta. She taught that "one thing will always secure heaven for us—the acts of charity and kindness with which we have filled our lives. **We can do no great things,"** Mother Teresa maintained, **"only small things with great love."**

Each of us should apply that principle to our attitudes in attending church. Some say "I didn't learn anything today" or "No one was friendly to me" or "I was offended" or "The Church is not filling my needs." All those answers are self-centered, and all retard spiritual growth.

In contrast, a wise friend wrote: "Years ago, I changed my attitude about going to church. **No longer do I go to church for my sake, but to think of others.** I make a point of saying hello to people who sit alone, to welcome visitors, ... to volunteer for an assignment. **In short, I go to church each week with the intent of being active, not passive, and making a positive difference in people's lives.** Consequently, my attendance at Church meetings is so much more enjoyable and fulfilling" ("Unselfish Service," *General Conference*, April 2009).

President David O. McKay was fond of this nineteenth-century quote: "**Life is made up not of great sacrifices or duties, but of little things** in which smiles and kindness and **small obligations given habitually** are what win and preserve the heart and secure comfort" (Humphry Davy, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Humphry Davy*, 391).

President Spencer W. Kimball: "God does notice us, and he watches over us. **But it is usually through another person that he meets our needs.** Therefore, it is vital that we serve each other in the kingdom. . . . So often, our acts of service consist of **simple encouragement or of giving mundane help** with mundane tasks, but what glorious consequences can flow from mundane acts and from **small but deliberate deeds!**" ("Small Acts of Service," *Ensign*, 12/74, 5)

Elder M. Russell Ballard: "In the Church, we often state the couplet, '**Be in the world but not of the world.**' ... Perhaps we should state the couplet ... as two separate admonitions. **First, 'Be in the world.' Be involved; be informed.** Try to be **understanding and tolerant and to appreciate diversity.** Make meaningful contributions to society through service and involvement. **Second, 'Be not of the world.' Do not follow wrong paths or bend to accommodate or accept what is not right.** ...
"Members of the Church need to influence more than we are influenced. We should work to stem the tide of sin and evil instead of passively being swept along by it. **We each need to help solve the problem rather than avoid or ignore it**" (Conference Report, Apr. 1989, 100–101; or *Ensign*, May 1989, 80).

Joseph B. Wirthlin: "At the final day the Savior will not ask about the nature of our callings. He will not inquire about our material possessions or fame. **He will ask if we ministered to the sick, gave food and drink to the hungry, visited those in prison, or gave succor to the weak. When we reach out to assist the least of Heavenly Father's children, we do it unto Him. That is the essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ**" ("The Great Commandment," *General Conference*, Oct. 2007).

SOMEONE I CHOOSE TO SEE

(Name)

(Reason)

(By this date)