

WOMEN'S DIVINE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

No more sacred word exists in secular or holy writ than that of mother.

—President Ezra Taft Benson

SELECTED TEACHINGS

See also "Mothers' Employment Outside the Home" on pages 237–40.

The Divine Work of Women

The Prophet Joseph Smith

"Let this Society teach women how to behave towards their husbands, to treat them with mildness and affection. When a man is borne down with trouble, when he is perplexed with care and difficulty, if he can meet a smile instead of an argument or a murmur—if he can meet with mildness, it will calm down his soul and soothe his feelings; when the mind is going to despair, it needs a solace of affection and kindness" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 228).

President Heber J. Grant

"There seems to be a power which the mother possesses in shaping the life of the child that is far superior, in my judgment, to the power of the father, and this almost without exception. . . . After all it is by love, real genuine love of our fellows, that we accomplish the most. A mother's love seems to be the most perfect and the most sincere, the strongest of any love we know anything about. I, for one, rejoice in it because of its wonderful example to me" (*Gospel Standards*, 152).

President George Albert Smith

"Woman has filled a wonderful part in the march of progress, but most important of all the duties that have been laid upon the gentler sex, is the duty of bringing into the world and rearing, the children

of our Heavenly Father" (*Sharing the Gospel with Others*, 139).

President David O. McKay

"Motherhood consists of three principal attributes or qualities: namely, (1) the power to bear, (2) the ability to rear, (3) the gift to love. . . .

"This ability and willingness properly to rear children, the gift to love, and eagerness, yes, longing to express it in soul development, make motherhood the noblest office or calling in the world" (*Gospel Ideals*, 453).

President Spencer W. Kimball

"Marriage is a partnership. Each is given a part of the work of life to do. The fact that some women and men disregard their work and their opportunities does not change the program.

"When we speak of marriage as a partnership, let us speak of marriage as a *full* partnership. We do not want our LDS women to be *silent* partners or *limited* partners in that eternal assignment! Please be a *contributing* and *full* partner" ("Privileges and Responsibilities of Sisters," *Ensign*, Nov. 1978, 106).

"The Lord organized the whole program in the beginning with a father who procreates, provides, and loves and directs, and a mother who conceives and bears and nurtures and feeds and trains. The Lord could have organized it otherwise but chose to have a unit with responsibility and purposeful associations where children train and discipline each other and come to love, honor, and appreciate each other. The family is the great plan of life as conceived and organized by our Father in heaven" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1973, 151; or *Ensign*, July 1973, 15).

President Ezra Taft Benson

"It is divinely ordained what a woman should do. . . . The divine work of women involves companionship, homemaking, and motherhood" ("In His Steps," 64).

"Brethren of the priesthood, I continue to emphasize the importance of mothers staying home to nurture, care for, and train their children in the principles of righteousness" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1987, 60; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1987, 49; see also *To the Fathers in Israel*, 3–4).

See *To the Mothers in Zion*, on pages 352–57.

"A mother's role is also God-ordained. Mothers are to conceive, bear, nourish, love, and train. They are

to be helpmates, and are to counsel with their husbands" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1984, 6; or *Ensign*, May 1984, 6).

"It is divinely ordained what a woman should do, but a man must seek out his work. The divine work of women involves companionship, homemaking, and motherhood. It is well if skills in these three areas can first be learned in the parents' home and then be supplemented at school if the need or desire presents itself" ("In His Steps," 64).

"There are voices in our midst which would attempt to convince you that these home-centered truths are not applicable to our present-day conditions. If you listen and heed, you will be lured away from your principal obligations.

"Beguiling voices in the world cry out for 'alternative life-styles' for women. They maintain that some women are better suited for careers than for marriage and motherhood.

"These individuals spread their discontent by the propaganda that there are more exciting and self-fulfilling roles for women than homemaking. Some even have been bold to suggest that the Church move away from the 'Mormon woman stereotype' of homemaking and rearing children. They also say it is wise to limit your family so you can have more time for personal goals and self-fulfillment" ("The Honored Place of Woman," *Ensign*, Nov. 1981, 105).

President Howard W. Hunter

"Mothers are given a sacred privilege to 'bear the souls of men; for herein is the work of [the] Father continued, that he may be glorified' (D&C 132:63).

"The First Presidency has said: 'Motherhood is near to divinity. It is the highest, holiest service to be assumed by mankind' (in James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–75], 6:178). The priesthood cannot work out its destiny, nor can God's purposes be fulfilled, without our helpmates. Mothers perform a labor the priesthood cannot do. For this gift of life, the priesthood should have love unbounded for the mothers of their children. . . .

". . . The Lord has commanded that women and children have claim on their husbands and fathers for their maintenance (see D&C 83; 1 Timothy 5:8). President Ezra Taft Benson has stated that when a husband encourages or insists that his wife work

out of the home for their convenience, 'not only will the family suffer in such instances, . . . but [his] own spiritual growth and progression will be hampered' (in Conference Report, Oct. 1987, pp. 60–61; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1987, p. 49)" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1994, 67, 69; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 50–51).

The Family: A Proclamation to the World

"The first commandment that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God's commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. . . .

"Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children. 'Children are an heritage of the Lord' (Psalms 127:3). . . .

". . . By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners. Disability, death, or other circumstances may necessitate individual adaptation. Extended families should lend support when needed" (*Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102).

Elder Ezra Taft Benson

"One apparent impact of the women's movement has been the feelings of discontent it has created among young women who have chosen the role of wife and mother. They are often made to feel that there are more exciting and self-fulfilling roles for women than housework, diaper changing, and children calling for mother. This view loses sight of the eternal perspective that God elected women to the noble role of mother and that exaltation is eternal fatherhood and eternal motherhood ('To the Elect Women of the Kingdom of God,' Nauvoo Illinois Relief Society Dedication, 30 June 1978)" (*Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, 548).

Elder Richard G. Scott

"Beware of the subtle ways Satan employs to take you from the plan of God [2 Nephi 9:13] and true happiness. One of Satan's most effective approaches is to demean the role of wife and mother in the home. This is an attack at the very heart of God's plan to

foster love between husband and wife and to nurture children in an atmosphere of understanding, peace, appreciation, and support. Much of the violence that is rampant in the world today is the harvest of weakened homes. Government and social plans will not effectively correct that, nor can the best efforts of schools and churches fully compensate for the absence of the tender care of a compassionate mother and wife in the home.

"This morning President Hinckley spoke of the importance of a mother in the home. Study his message. As a mother guided by the Lord, you weave a fabric of character in your children from threads of truth through careful instruction and worthy example. You imbue the traits of honesty, faith in God, duty, respect for others, kindness, self-confidence, and the desire to contribute, to learn, and to give in your trusting children's minds and hearts. No day-care center can do that. It is your sacred right and privilege.

"Of course, as a woman you can do exceptionally well in the workplace, but is that the best use of your divinely appointed talents and feminine traits? As a husband, don't encourage your wife to go to work to help in your divinely appointed responsibility of providing resources for the family, if you can possibly avoid it. As the prophets have counseled, to the extent possible with the help of the Lord, as parents, work together to keep Mother in the home.²² Your presence there will strengthen the self-confidence of your children and decrease the chance of emotional challenges. Moreover, as you teach truth by word and example, those children will come to understand who they are and what they can obtain as divine children of Father in Heaven" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 102; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 74–75).

Sister Patricia T. Holland

"Eve was given the identity of 'the mother of all living' . . . before she ever bore a child. It would appear that her *motherhood preceded her maternity*, just as surely as the perfection of the Garden preceded the struggles of mortality. I believe *mother* is one of those very carefully chosen words, one of those rich words—with meaning after meaning after meaning. We must not, at all costs, let that word divide us. I believe with all of my heart that it is first and foremost a statement about nature, not a head count of our children.

". . . Some women give birth and raise children but never 'mother' them. Others, whom I love with all my heart, 'mother' all their lives but have never given birth. And all of us are Eve's daughters, whether we are married or single, maternal or barren. We are created in the image of the Gods to become gods and goddesses" ("One Thing Needful": Becoming Women of Greater Faith in Christ," *Ensign*, Oct. 1987, 33).

What Is a Help Meet?

President Howard W. Hunter

"A man who holds the priesthood accepts his wife as a partner in the leadership of the home and family with full knowledge of and full participation in all decisions relating thereto. Of necessity there must be in the Church and in the home a presiding officer (see D&C 107:21). By divine appointment, the responsibility to preside in the home rests upon the priesthood holder (see Moses 4:22). The Lord intended that the wife be a helpmeet for man (*meet* means equal)—that is, a companion equal and necessary in full partnership. Presiding in righteousness necessitates a shared responsibility between husband and wife; together you act with knowledge and participation in all family matters. For a man to operate independently of or without regard to the feelings and counsel of his wife in governing the family is to exercise unrighteous dominion" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1994, 68; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 50–51).

THE ROLE OF RIGHTEOUS WOMEN



President Spencer W. Kimball

President of the Church

*Read by his wife,
Sister Camilla Kimball*

*Ensign, Nov. 1979,
102–4*

My beloved sisters: I have been looking forward for months to the pleasure of meeting with you dear sisters once again in a worldwide conference of the women of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Unfortunately for me, I am in the hospital here in Salt Lake City and will not be present with you in person, but I will be with you in spirit. In fact, I will be watching and listening here in my room at the LDS Hospital.

The counsel given at our meeting last year is still appropriate. Whenever I reflect and ponder upon the glorious truths of the gospel, and that is often, I wonder if we even begin to appreciate the implications of these glorious truths. Let us begin with a few examples.

The scriptures and the prophets have taught us clearly that God, who is perfect in his attribute of justice, "is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34). We know also that God is perfect in his love for each and all of us as his spirit children. When we know these truths, my sisters and associates in this divine cause, it should help us greatly as we all experience much less than perfect love and perfect justice in the world. If, in the short term, we are sometimes dealt with insensitively and thoughtlessly by others, by imperfect men and women, it may still cause us pain, but such pain and disappointment are not the whole of life. The ways of the world will not prevail, for the ways of God will triumph.

We had full equality as his spirit children. We have equality as recipients of God's perfected love for each of us. The late Elder John A. Widtsoe wrote:

"The place of woman in the Church is to walk beside the man, not in front of him nor behind him. In the Church there is full equality between man and woman. The gospel, which is the only concern of the Church, was devised by the Lord for men and women alike" (*Improvement Era*, Mar. 1942, p. 161).

Within those great assurances, however, our roles and assignments differ. These are eternal differences—with women being given many tremendous responsibilities of motherhood and sisterhood and men being given the tremendous responsibilities of fatherhood and the priesthood—but the man is not without the woman nor the woman without the man in the Lord (see 1 Cor. 11:11). Both a righteous man and a righteous woman are a blessing to all those their lives touch.

Remember, in the world before we came here, faithful women were given certain assignments while faithful men were foreordained to certain priesthood tasks. While we do not now remember the particulars, this does not alter the glorious reality of what we once agreed to. You are accountable for those things which long ago were expected of you just as are those we sustain as prophets and apostles!

Even though the eternal roles of men and women differ, as we indicated to you a year ago, this leaves

much to be done by way of parallel personal development—for both men and women. In this connection, I stress again the deep need each woman has to study the scriptures. We want our homes to be blessed with sister scriptorians—whether you are single or married, young or old, widowed or living in a family.

Regardless of your particular circumstances, as you become more and more familiar with the truths of the scriptures, you will be more and more effective in keeping the second great commandment, to love your neighbor as yourself. Become scholars of the scriptures—not to put others down, but to lift them up! After all, who has any greater need to "treasure up" the truths of the gospel (on which they may call in their moments of need) than do women and mothers who do so much nurturing and teaching? Seek excellence in all your righteous endeavors, and in all aspects of your lives.

Bear in mind, dear sisters, that the eternal blessings which are yours through membership in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are far, far greater than any other blessings you could possibly receive. No greater recognition can come to you in this world than to be known as a woman of God. No greater status can be conferred upon you than being a daughter of God who experiences true sisterhood, wifehood, and motherhood, or other tasks which influence lives for good.

True, there are some temporary differences and some constraining circumstances. Some of you have lost your husbands through death, others through divorce. Some of you have not yet had the great privilege of marriage. But, on the scale of eternity, the missing of these blessings "shall be but a small moment" (see D&C 121:7).

Others of the sisters are experiencing the anguish that often goes with aging. Still others of you now know the uncertainty of being young as you ponder your place in the eternal scheme of things. But real as these challenges are, all of you need to drink in deeply the gospel truths about the eternal nature of your individual identity and the uniqueness of your personality. You need, more and more, to feel the perfect love which our Father in Heaven has for you and to sense the value he places upon you as an individual. Ponder upon these great truths, especially in those moments when (in the stillness of such anxiety as you may experience as an individual) you might otherwise wonder and be perplexed.

Remember, too, as we focus on the glories and importance of family life here, that all of us belong to the eternal family of our Father in Heaven.

Be assured, too, that all faithful sisters, who, through no fault of their own, do not have the privilege during their second estate of being sealed to a worthy man, will have that blessing in eternity. On occasions when you ache for that acceptance and affection which belong to family life on earth, please know that our Father in Heaven is aware of your anguish, and that one day he will bless you beyond your capacity to express.

Sometimes to be tested and proved requires that we be temporarily deprived—but righteous women and men will one day receive *all*—think of it, sisters—*all* that our Father has! It is not only worth waiting for; it is worth living for!

Meanwhile, one does not need to be married or a mother in order to keep the first and second great commandments—those of loving God and our fellowmen—on which Jesus said hang all the law and all the prophets.

Some women, because of circumstances beyond their control, must work. We understand that. We understand further that as families are raised, the talents God has given you and blessed you with can often be put to effective use in additional service to mankind. Do not, however, make the mistake of being drawn off into secondary tasks which will cause the neglect of your eternal assignments such as giving birth to and rearing the spirit children of our Father in Heaven. Pray carefully over all your decisions.

We wish you to pursue and to achieve that education, therefore, which will fit you for eternity *as well as* for full service in mortality. In addition to those basic and vital skills which go with homemaking, there are other skills which can be appropriately cultivated and which will increase your effectiveness in the home, in the Church, and in the community.

Again, you must be wise in the choices that you make, but we do not desire the women of the Church to be uninformed or ineffective. You will be better mothers and wives, both in this life and in eternity, if you sharpen the skills you have been given and use the talents with which God has blessed you.

There is no greater and more glorious set of promises given to women than those which come through the gospel and the Church of Jesus Christ.

There is no greater and more glorious set of promises given to women than those which come through the gospel and the Church of Jesus Christ. Where else can you learn who you really are? Where else can you be given the necessary explanations and assurances about the nature of life? From what other source can you learn about your own uniqueness and identity? From whom else could you learn of our Father in Heaven's glorious plan of happiness?

The gospel answers are the only true answers to the questions which women and men, over the centuries, have raised about themselves, about life, and about the universe. How good God has been to us all in blessing us with these answers and assurances—even though these truths place upon us serious and everlasting obligations.

How special it is for Latter-day Saint women to be given the lofty assignments they have been given by our Father in Heaven, especially those of you who have been privileged to be born in this part of this last dispensation. Let other women pursue heedlessly what they perceive as their selfish interests. You can be a much needed force for love and truth and righteousness on this planet. Let others selfishly pursue false values, but God has given to you the tremendous tasks of *nurturing* families, friends, and neighbors, just as men are to *provide*. But *both* husband and wife are to be parents!

Finally, my dear sisters, may I suggest to you something that has not been said before or at least in quite this way. Much of the major growth that is coming to the Church in the last days will come because many of the good women of the world (in whom there is often such an inner sense of spirituality) will be drawn to the Church in large numbers. This will happen to the degree that the women of the Church reflect righteousness and articulateness in their lives and to the degree that the women of the Church are seen as distinct and different—in happy ways—from the women of the world.

Among the real heroines in the world who will come into the Church are women who are more concerned with being righteous than with being selfish. These real heroines have true humility, which places a higher value on integrity than on visibility.

Remember, it is as wrong to do things just to be seen of women as it is to do things to be seen of men. Great women and men are always more anxious to serve than to have dominion.

Thus it will be that female exemplars of the Church will be a significant force in both the numerical and the spiritual growth of the Church in the last days.

No wonder the adversary strives, even now, to prevent this from happening! Regardless of who is getting the adversary's special attention at any given time, he seeks to make all people "miserable like unto himself" (2 Ne. 2:27). Indeed, he seeks "the misery of all mankind" (2 Ne. 2:18). He is undeviating in his purposes and is clever and relentless in his pursuit of them.

As we approach the general conference with its priesthood session, we will be no less loving or direct with the brethren, for our counsel will be similar.

We love you sisters. We have confidence in you. We rejoice in your devotion. We are greatly heartened by your presence not only tonight but in this portion of this dispensation wherein your talents and spiritual strength are so desperately needed.

May God bless you so that all the previous blessings promised to you will become a reality in this life and in the world to come.

I know that God lives, that Jesus is his Only Begotten Son, the Redeemer of the world, and that this is the Church of Jesus Christ, with him as its head. I leave this testimony with you with my love and my blessings. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

TO THE MOTHERS IN ZION



*President Ezra Taft Benson
President of the Church
Fireside address,
22 Feb. 1987*

There is no theme I would rather speak to than home and family, for they are at the very heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Church, in large part, exists for the salvation and exaltation of the family.

At a recent general priesthood meeting, I spoke directly to the young men of the Aaronic

Priesthood regarding their duties and responsibilities. Shortly thereafter, at a general women's conference, I spoke to the young women of the Church, discussing their opportunities and their sacred callings.

Tonight, at this fireside for parents, seeking the sweet inspiration of heaven, I would like to speak directly to the mothers assembled here and throughout the Church, for you are, or should be, the very heart and soul of the family.

No More Noble Work

No more sacred word exists in secular or holy writ than that of *mother*. There is no more noble work than that of a good and God-fearing mother.

This evening I pay tribute to the mothers in Zion and pray with all my heart that what I have to say to you will be understood by the Spirit and will lift and bless your lives in your sacred callings as mothers.

President David O. McKay declared: "Motherhood is the greatest potential influence either for good or ill in human life. The mother's image is the first that stamps itself on the unwritten page of the young child's mind. It is her caress that first awakens a sense of security; her kiss, the first realization of affection; her sympathy and tenderness, the first assurance that there is love in the world."

President McKay continues: "Motherhood consists of three principal attributes or qualities: namely, (1) the power to bear, (2) the ability to rear, (3) the gift to love. . . .

"This ability and willingness properly to rear children, the gift to love, and eagerness, yes, longing to express it in soul development, make motherhood the noblest office or calling in the world. She who can paint a masterpiece or write a book that will influence millions deserves the admiration and the plaudits of mankind; but she who rears successfully a family of healthy, beautiful sons and daughters, whose influence will be felt through generations to come, . . . deserves the highest honor that man can give, and the choicest blessings of God" (*Gospel Ideals*, 452–54).

With all my heart I endorse the words of President McKay.

A Mother's Role Is God-Ordained

In the eternal family, God established that fathers are to preside in the home. Fathers are to provide, to love, to teach, and to direct.

But a mother's role is also God-ordained. Mothers are to conceive, to bear, to nourish, to love, and to train. So declare the revelations.

In section 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord states that the opportunity and responsibility of wives is "to multiply and replenish the earth, according to my commandment, and to fulfil the promise which was given by my Father before the foundation of the world, and for their exaltation in the eternal worlds, that they may bear the souls of men; for herein is the work of my Father continued, that he may be glorified" (D&C 132:63).

Husbands and Wives Are Co-Creators

With this divine injunction, husbands and wives, as co-creators, should eagerly and prayerfully invite children into their homes. Then, as each child joins their family circle, they can gratefully exclaim, as did Hannah, "For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him: Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord: as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord" (1 Samuel 1:27–28).

Isn't that beautiful? A mother praying to bear a child and then giving him to the Lord.

I have always loved the words of Solomon: "Children are an heritage of the Lord: and . . . happy is the man [and woman] that hath [their] quiver full of them" (Psalm 127:3–5).

I know the special blessings of a large and happy family, for my dear parents had a quiver full of children. Being the oldest of eleven children, I saw the principles of unselfishness, mutual consideration, loyalty to each other, and a host of other virtues developed in a large and wonderful family with my noble mother as the queen of that home.

Young mothers and fathers, with all my heart I counsel you not to postpone having your children, being co-creators with our Father in Heaven.

Do not use the reasoning of the world, such as, "We'll wait until we can better afford having children, until we are more secure, until John has completed his education, until he has a better-paying job, until we have a larger home, until we've obtained a few of the material conveniences," and on and on.

This is the reasoning of the world, and is not pleasing in the sight of God. Mothers who enjoy good health,

have your children and have them early. And, husbands, always be considerate of your wives in the bearing of children.

Do not curtail the number of your children for personal or selfish reasons. Material possessions, social convenience, and so-called professional advantages are nothing compared to a righteous posterity. In the eternal perspective, children—not possessions, not position, not prestige—are our greatest jewels.

Brigham Young emphasized: "There are multitudes of pure and holy spirits waiting to take tabernacles, now what is our duty?—To prepare tabernacles for them; to take a course that will not tend to drive those spirits into the families of the wicked, where they will be trained in wickedness, debauchery, and every species of crime. It is the duty of every

righteous man and woman to prepare tabernacles for all the spirits they can" (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel.

John A. Widtsoe [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1954], p. 197).

Yes, blessed is the husband and wife who have a family of children. The deepest joys and blessings in life are associated with family, parenthood, and sacrifice.

spirits come into the home is worth practically any sacrifice.

Special Promises of God

We realize that some women, through no fault of their own, are not able to bear children. To these lovely sisters, every prophet of God has promised that they will be blessed with children in the eternities and that posterity will not be denied them.

Through pure faith, pleading prayers, fasting, and special priesthood blessings, many of these same lovely sisters, with their noble companions at their sides, have had miracles take place in their lives and have been blessed with children. Others have prayerfully chosen to adopt children, and to these wonderful couples we salute you for the sacrifices and love you have given to those children you have chosen to be your own.

Rearing Children the Lord's Way

Now, my dear mothers, knowing of your divine role to bear and rear children and bring them back to

*The deepest joys
and blessings in
life are associated
with family,
parenthood, and
sacrifice.*

Him, how will you accomplish this in the Lord's way? I say the "Lord's way," because it is different from the world's way.

The Lord clearly defined the roles of mothers and fathers in providing for and rearing a righteous posterity. In the beginning, Adam—not Eve—was instructed to earn the bread by the sweat of his brow. Contrary to conventional wisdom, a mother's calling is in the home, not in the marketplace.

Again, in the Doctrine and Covenants, we read: "Women have claim on their husbands for their maintenance, until their husbands are taken" (D&C 83:2). This is the divine right of a wife and mother. She cares for and nourishes her children at home. Her husband earns the living for the family, which makes this nourishing possible. With that claim on their husbands for their financial support, the counsel of the Church has always been for mothers to spend their full time in the home in rearing and caring for their children.

We realize also that some of our choice sisters are widowed and divorced and that others find themselves in unusual circumstances where, out of necessity, they are required to work for a period of time. But these instances are the exception, not the rule.

In a home where there is an able-bodied husband, he is expected to be the breadwinner. Sometimes we hear of husbands who, because of economic conditions, have lost their jobs and expect their wives to go out of the home and work even though the husband is still capable of providing for his family. In these cases, we urge the husband to do all in his power to allow his wife to remain in the home caring for the children while he continues to provide for his family the best he can, even though the job he is able to secure may not be ideal and family budgeting will have to be tighter.

Counsel of President Kimball

Our beloved prophet Spencer W. Kimball had much to say about the role of mothers in the home and their callings and responsibilities. I am impressed tonight to share with you some of his inspired pronouncements. I fear that much of his counsel has gone unheeded, and families have suffered because of it. But I stand this evening as a second witness to the

truthfulness of what President Spencer W. Kimball said. He spoke as a true prophet of God.

President Kimball declared: "Women are to take care of the family—the Lord has so stated—to be an assistant to the husband, to work with him, but not to earn the living, except in unusual circumstances. Men ought to be men indeed and earn the living under normal circumstances" (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, . . . p. 318).

President Kimball continues: "Too many mothers work away from home to furnish sweaters and music lessons and trips and fun for their children. Too many women spend their time in socializing, in politicking, in public services when they should be home to teach and train and receive and love their children into security" (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, p. 319).

Remember the counsel of President Kimball to John and Mary: "Mary, you are to become a career woman in the greatest career on earth—that of homemaker, wife, and mother. It was never intended by the Lord that married women should compete with men in employment. They have a far greater and more important service to render" (*Faith Precedes the Miracle* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1975], p. 128).

Again President Kimball speaks: "The husband is expected to support his family and only in an emergency should a wife secure outside employment. Her place is in the home, to build the home into a heaven of delight.

"Numerous divorces can be traced directly to the day when the wife left the home and went out into the world into employment. Two incomes raise the standard of living beyond its norm. Two spouses working prevent the complete and proper home life, break into the family prayers, create an independence which is not cooperative, causes distortion, limits the family, and frustrates the children already born" (fireside address, San Antonio, Texas, 3 Dec. 1977).

Finally, President Kimball counsels: "I beg of you, you who could and should be bearing and rearing a family: wives, come home from the typewriter, the laundry, the nursing, come home from the factory, the café. No career approaches in importance that of wife, homemaker, mother—cooking meals, washing dishes, making beds for one's precious husband and children. Come home,

No career approaches in importance that of wife, homemaker, mother.

wives, to your husbands. Make home a heaven for them. Come home, wives, to your children, born and unborn. Wrap the motherly cloak about you and, unembarrassed, help in a major role to create the bodies for the immortal souls who anxiously await.

"When you have fully complemented your husband in home life and borne the children, growing up full of faith, integrity, responsibility, and goodness, then you have achieved your accomplishment supreme, without peer, and you will be the envy [of all] through time and eternity" (fireside address, San Antonio, Texas).

President Kimball spoke the truth. His words are prophetic.

Ten Ways to Spend Time with Children

Mothers in Zion, your God-given roles are so vital to your own exaltation and to the salvation and exaltation of your family. A child needs a mother more than all the things money can buy. Spending time with your children is the greatest gift of all.

With love in my heart for the mothers in Zion, I would now like to suggest ten specific ways our mothers may spend effective time with their children.

Be at the Crossroads. First, take time to always be at the crossroads when your children are either coming or going—when they leave and return from school, when they leave and return from dates, when they bring friends home. Be there at the crossroads whether your children are six or sixteen. In Proverbs we read, "A child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame" (Proverbs 29:15). Among the greatest concerns in our society are the millions of latchkey children who come home daily to empty houses, unsupervised by working parents.

Be a Real Friend. Second, mothers, take time to be a real friend to your children. Listen to your children, really listen. Talk with them, laugh and joke with them, sing with them, play with them, cry with them, hug them, honestly praise them. Yes, regularly spend unrushed one-on-one time with each child. Be a real friend to your children.

Read to Your Children. Third, mothers, take time to read to your children. Starting from the cradle, read to your sons and daughters. Remember what the poet said:

*You may have tangible wealth untold;
Caskets of jewels and coffers of gold.
Richer than I you can never be—*

I had a mother who read to me.

(Strickland Gillilan, "The Reading Mother.")

You will plant a love for good literature and a real love for the scriptures if you will read to your children regularly.

Pray with Your Children. Fourth, take time to pray with your children. Family prayers, under the direction of the father, should be held morning and night. Have your children feel of your faith as you call down the blessings of heaven upon them. Paraphrasing the words of James, "The . . . fervent prayer of a righteous [mother] availeth much" (James 5:16). Have your children participate in family and personal prayers, and rejoice in their sweet utterances to their Father in Heaven.

Have Weekly Home Evenings. Fifth, take time to have a meaningful weekly home evening. With your husband presiding, participate in a spiritual and an uplifting home evening each week. Have your children actively involved. Teach them correct principles. Make this one of your great family traditions. Remember the marvelous promise made by President Joseph F. Smith when home evenings were first introduced to the Church: "If the Saints obey this counsel, we promise that great blessings will result. Love at home and obedience to parents will increase. Faith will be developed in the hearts of the youth of Israel, and they will gain power to combat the evil influence and temptations which beset them" (James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–75], 4:339). This wonderful promise is still in effect today.

Be Together at Mealtimes. Sixth, take time to be together at mealtimes as often as possible. This is a challenge as the children get older and lives get busier. But happy conversation, sharing of the day's plans and activities, and special teaching moments occur at mealtime because mothers and fathers and children work at it.

Read Scriptures Daily. Seventh, take time daily to read the scriptures together as a family. Individual scripture reading is important, but family scripture reading is vital. Reading the Book of Mormon together as a family will especially bring increased spirituality into your home and will give both parents and children the power to resist temptation and to have the Holy Ghost as their constant companion. I promise you that the Book of Mormon will change the lives of your family.

Do Things as a Family. Eighth, take time to do things together as a family. Make family outings and picnics and birthday celebrations and trips special times and memory builders. Whenever possible, attend, as a family, events where one of the family members is involved, such as a school play, a ball game, a talk, a recital. Attend church meetings together and sit together as a family when you can. Mothers who help families pray and play together will stay together and will bless children's lives forever.

Teach Your Children. Ninth, mothers, take time to teach your children. Catch the teaching moments. This can be done anytime during the day—at mealtime, in casual settings, or at special sit-down times together, at the foot of the bed at the end of the day, or during an early morning walk together. Mothers, you are your children's best teacher. Don't shift this precious responsibility to day-care centers or baby-sitters. A mother's love and prayerful concern for the children are her most important ingredients in teaching her own.

Teach children gospel principles. Teach them it pays to be good. Teach them there is no safety in sin. Teach them a love for the gospel of Jesus Christ and a testimony of its divinity.

Teach your sons and daughters modesty, and teach them to respect manhood and womanhood. Teach your children sexual purity, proper dating standards, temple marriage, missionary service, and the importance of accepting and magnifying Church callings.

Teach them a love for work and the value of a good education.

Teach them the importance of the right kind of entertainment, including appropriate movies and videos and music and books and magazines. Discuss the evils of pornography and drugs, and teach them the value of living the clean life.

Yes, mothers, teach your children the gospel in your own home, at your own fireside. This is the most effective teaching that your children will ever receive. This is the Lord's way of teaching. The Church cannot teach like you can. The school cannot. The day-care center cannot. But you can, and the Lord will sustain you. Your children will remember your teachings forever, and when they are old, they will not depart from them. They will call you blessed—their truly angel mother.

Mothers, this kind of heavenly, motherly teaching takes time—lots of time. It cannot be done effectively

part-time. It must be done all the time in order to save and exalt your children. This is your divine calling.

Truly Love Your Children. Tenth and finally, mothers, take the time to truly love your children. A mother's unqualified love approaches Christlike love.

Here is a beautiful tribute by a son to his mother: "I don't remember much about her views of voting nor her social prestige; and what her ideas on child training, diet, and eugenics were, I cannot recall. The main thing that sifts back to me now through the thick undergrowth of years is that she loved me. She liked to lie on the grass with me and tell stories, or to run and hide with us children. She was always hugging me. And I liked it. She had a sunny face. To me it was like God, and all the beatitudes saints tell of Him. And Sing! Of all the sensations pleasurable to my life nothing can compare with the rapture of crawling up into her lap and going to sleep while she swung to and fro in her rocking chair and sang. Thinking of this, I wonder if the woman of today, with all her tremendous notions and plans, realizes what an almighty factor she is in shaping of her child for weal or woe. I wonder if she realizes how much sheer love and attention count for in a child's life."

Mothers, your teenage children also need that same kind of love and attention. It seems easier for many mothers and fathers to express and show their love to their children when they are young, but more difficult when they are older. Work at this prayerfully. There need be no generation gap. And the key is love. Our young people need love and attention, not indulgence. They need empathy and understanding, not indifference from mothers and fathers. They need the parents' time. A mother's kindly teachings and her love for and confidence in a teenage son or daughter can literally save them from a wicked world.

Blessings of the Lord upon Parents

In closing, I would be remiss this evening if I did not express my love and eternal gratitude for my sweetheart and companion and the mother of our six children. Her devotion to motherhood has blessed me and our family beyond words of expression. She has been a marvelous mother, completely and happily devoting her life and her mission to her family. How grateful I am for Flora!

May I also express my gratitude to you fathers and husbands assembled this evening. We look to you

to give righteous leadership in your home and families and, with your companions and the mothers of your children, to lead your families back to our Eternal Father.

Now God bless our wonderful mothers. We pray for you. We sustain you. We honor you as you bear, nourish, train, teach, and love for eternity. I promise you the blessings of heaven and "all that [the] Father hath" (see D&C 84:38) as you magnify the noblest calling of all—a mother in Zion. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

WOMEN OF THE CHURCH



President Gordon B. Hinckley

President of the Church

In Conference Report,

Oct. 1996, 90–95;

or Ensign, Nov.

1996, 67–70

Women Are Essential to God's Plan

Half, possibly more than half, of the adult members of the Church are women. It is to them that I wish particularly to speak this morning. I do so with the hope that the men will also hear.

First let me say to you sisters that you do not hold a second place in our Father's plan for the eternal happiness and well-being of His children. You are an absolutely essential part of that plan.

Without you the plan could not function. Without you the entire program would be frustrated. As I have said before from this pulpit, when the process of creation occurred, Jehovah, the Creator, under instruction from His Father, first divided the light from the darkness and then separated the land from the waters. There followed the creation of plant life, followed by the creation of animal life. Then came the creation of man, and culminating that act of divinity came the crowning act, the creation of woman.

Each of you is a daughter of God, endowed with a divine birthright. You need no defense of that position.

Great Strength in Women of the Church

As I go about from place to place, I am interviewed by representatives of the media. Invariably they ask

about the place of women in the Church. They do so in an almost accusatory tone, as if we denigrate and demean women. I invariably reply that I know of no other organization in all the world which affords women so many opportunities for development, for sociality, for the accomplishment of great good, for holding positions of leadership and responsibility.

I wish all of these reporters could have been in the Tabernacle a week ago Saturday when the general Relief Society meeting was held. It was an inspiration to look into the faces of that vast gathering of the daughters of God, women of faith and ability, women who know what life is about and have something of a sense of the divinity of their creation. I wish they could have heard that great chorus of young women from Brigham Young University, who touched our hearts with the beauty of their singing. I wish they could have heard the stirring messages of the Relief Society general presidency, each of whom spoke on a phase of the subject faith, hope, and charity.

What able people these women are. They express themselves with power and conviction and great persuasiveness. President Faust concluded that service with a wonderful talk.

If those reporters who are prone to raise this question could have sat in that vast congregation, they would have known, even without further inquiry, that there is strength and great capacity in the women of this Church. There is leadership and direction, a certain spirit of independence, and yet great satisfaction in being a part of this, the Lord's kingdom, and of working hand in hand with the priesthood to move it forward.

The Real Builders of the Nation

Many of you are here today who were in that meeting. Today you are seated with your husbands, men whom you love and honor and respect, and who in turn love and honor and respect you. You know how fortunate you are to be married to a good man who is your companion in life and who will be your companion throughout eternity. Together, as you have served in many capacities and reared your families and provided for them, you have faced a variety of storms and come through them all with your heads held high. Most of you are mothers, and very many of you are grandmothers and even great-grandmothers. You have walked the sometimes painful, sometimes joyous path of

parenthood. You have walked hand in hand with God in the great process of bringing children into the world that they might experience this estate along the road of immortality and eternal life. It has not been easy rearing a family. Most of you have had to sacrifice and skimp and labor night and day. As I think of you and your circumstances, I think of the words of Anne Campbell, who wrote as she looked upon her children:

*You are the trip I did not take;
You are the pearls I cannot buy;
You are my blue Italian lake;
You are my piece of foreign sky.*

[“To My Child,” quoted in Charles L. Wallis, ed., *The Treasure Chest* (1965), 54]

You sisters are the real builders of the nation wherever you live, for you have created homes of strength and peace and security. These become the very sinew of any nation.

Rebuke to Abusers

Unfortunately a few of you may be married to men who are abusive. Some of them put on a fine face before the world during the day and come home in the evening, set aside their self-discipline, and on the slightest provocation fly into outbursts of anger.

No man who engages in such evil and unbecoming behavior is worthy of the priesthood of God. No man who so conducts himself is worthy of the privileges of the house of the Lord. I regret that there are some men undeserving of the love of their wives and children. There are children who fear their fathers, and wives who fear their husbands. If there be any such men within the hearing of my voice, as a servant of the Lord I rebuke you and call you to repentance. Discipline yourselves. Master your temper. Most of the things that make you angry are of very small consequence. And what a terrible price you are paying for your anger. Ask the Lord to forgive you. Ask your wife to forgive you. Apologize to your children.

Advice to Single Women

There are many women among us who are single. Generally this is not of their own choice. Some have never had the opportunity to marry one with whom they would wish to spend eternity.

To you single women who wish to be married, I repeat what I recently said in a meeting for singles in this Tabernacle:

“Do not give up hope. And do not give up trying. But do give up being obsessed with it. The chances are that if you forget about it and become anxiously engaged in other activities, the prospects will brighten immeasurably. . . .

“I believe that for most of us the best medicine for loneliness is work, service in behalf of others. I do not minimize your problems, but I do not hesitate to say that there are many others whose problems are more serious than are yours. Reach out to serve them, to help them, to encourage them. There are so many boys and girls who fail in school for want of a little personal attention and encouragement. There are so many elderly people who live in misery and loneliness and fear for whom a simple conversation would bring a measure of hope and happiness” (Salt Lake Valley single adult fireside, 22 Sept. 1996).

Assist Women Who Have Lost Husbands

Included among the women of the Church are those who have lost their husbands through abandonment, divorce, and death. Great is our obligation to you. As the scriptures declare, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

I received a letter from one who counts herself fortunate, and indeed fortunate she is. She writes:

“Although I have been raising our four boys as a single parent, . . . I am not alone. I have a wonderful ‘ward family’ that has rallied around us. . . .

“My Relief Society president has been there for me through my greatest hardships, encouraging my spiritual growth, personal prayer, and temple attendance.

“Our bishop has been generous in providing needed food and clothing and has helped send two of the boys to camp. He has had interviews with all of us and given each of us blessings and needed encouragement. He has helped me to budget and do what I can to help my family.

“Our home teachers have come regularly and even gave the boys blessings as they started the new school year.

“Our stake president and his counselors have checked in on us on a regular basis by taking time to visit with us at church, on the phone, or in our home.

"This Church is true, and my boys and I are living proof that God loves us and that a 'ward family' can make all the difference.

"Our priesthood leaders have been instrumental in keeping the boys active in church and in the Scouting program. [One] is an Eagle Scout and is receiving his fourth palm this week. [Another] is an Eagle with three palms. And [a third] has just turned in his Eagle papers this week. The youngest is a Webelos and loves Cub Scouts.

"We are always met with loving hearts and warm handshakes. The Christlike attitude of the stake and our ward has helped us through trials we never imagined possible.

"Life has been hard, . . . but we put on the whole armor of God as we kneel in family prayer . . . , asking for help and guidance and sharing thanks for the blessings we have received. I pray daily for the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost to guide me as I raise these boys to be missionaries and encourage them to be true to the gospel and the priesthood they hold.

"I am proud to say I am a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I know this Church is true. I sustain my Church leaders. We are doing well, and I thank everyone for their love and prayers and acceptance."

What a great letter that is! How much it says about the way this Church functions and should function throughout the world. I hope that every woman who finds herself in the kind of circumstances in which this woman lives is similarly blessed with an understanding and helpful bishop, with a Relief Society president who knows how to assist her, with home teachers who know where their duty lies and how to fulfill it, and with a host of ward members who are helpful without being intrusive.

I have never met the woman whose letter I have read. Notwithstanding the cheerful attitude she conveys, I am sure there has been much of struggle and loneliness and, at times, fear. I notice that she works to provide for her needs and the needs of her boys, who are in their teens. I assume her income is inadequate, because she indicates that the bishop has helped them with food and clothing.

Advice on Employment Outside the Home

Some years ago President Benson delivered a message to the women of the Church. He encouraged them

to leave their employment and give their individual time to their children. I sustain the position which he took.

Nevertheless, I recognize, as he recognized, that there are some women (it has become very many, in fact) who have to work to provide for the needs of their families. To you I say, do the very best you can. I hope that if you are employed full-time you are doing it to ensure that basic needs are met and not simply to indulge a taste for an elaborate home, fancy cars, and other luxuries. The greatest job that any mother will ever do will be in nurturing, teaching, lifting, encouraging, and rearing her children in righteousness and truth. None other can adequately take her place.

It is well-nigh impossible to be a full-time homemaker and a full-time employee. I know how some of you struggle with decisions concerning this matter. I repeat, do the very best you can. You know your circumstances, and I know that you are deeply concerned for the welfare of your children. Each of you has a bishop who will counsel with you and assist you. If you feel you need to speak with an understanding woman, do not hesitate to get in touch with your Relief Society president.

To the mothers of this Church, every mother who is here today, I want to say that as the years pass, you will become increasingly grateful for that which you did in molding the lives of your children in the direction of righteousness and goodness, integrity and faith. That is most likely to happen if you can spend adequate time with them.

Advice to Single Parents

For you who are single parents, I say that many hands stand ready to help you. The Lord is not unmindful of you. Neither is His Church.

May He bless you, my beloved sisters who find yourselves in the situation of single parenthood. May you have health, strength, vitality to carry the heavy burden that is yours. May you have loving friends and associates to bear you up in your times of trial. You know the power of prayer as perhaps few others do. Many of you spend much time on your knees speaking with your Father in Heaven, with tears running down your cheeks. Please know that we also pray for you.

With all that you have to do, you are also asked to serve in the Church. Your bishop will not ask you

to do anything that is beyond your capacity. And as you so serve, a new dimension will be added to your life. You will find new and stimulating associations. You will find friendship and sociality. You will grow in knowledge and understanding and wisdom and in your capacity to do. You will become a better mother because of the service you give in the work of the Lord.

To Older Women

Now in conclusion I wish to say a word to you older women, many of whom are widows. You are a great treasure. You have passed through the storms of life. You have weathered the challenges now facing your younger sisters. You are mature in wisdom, in understanding, in compassion, in love and service.

There is a certain beauty that shines through your countenances. It is the beauty that comes of peace. There may still be struggle, but there is mature wisdom to meet it. There are health problems, but there is a certain composure concerning them. The bad memories of the past have largely been forgotten, while the good memories return and bring sweet and satisfying enrichment to life.

You have learned to love the scriptures, and you read them. Your prayers for the most part are prayers of thanksgiving. Your greetings are words of kindness. Your friendship is a sturdy staff on which others may lean.

What a resource are the women of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. You love this Church; you accept its doctrine; you honor your place in its organization; you bring luster and strength and beauty to its congregations. How thankful we are to you. How much you are loved, respected, and honored.

I salute my own beloved companion. It will soon be 60 years ago that we walked from the Salt Lake Temple as husband and wife, with love for one another. That love has strengthened through all of these years. We have faced many problems during our years of marriage. Somehow, with the blessing of the Lord, we have survived them all.

It is becoming physically harder to stand tall and straight as we did in our younger years. No matter—we still have one another and we still stand together, even though we lean a little. And when the time for separation comes, there will be much of sorrow, but there will also be the comfort that will come from the assurance that she is mine and I am hers for the eternity that lies ahead.

Appreciation for Sisters

And so, my beloved sisters, please know how much we appreciate you. You bring a measure of wholeness to us. You have great strength. With dignity and tremendous ability, you carry forward the remarkable programs of the Relief Society, the Young Women, and the Primary. You teach Sunday School. We walk at your side as your companions and your brethren with respect and love, with honor and great admiration. It was the Lord who designated that men in His Church should hold the priesthood. It was He who has given you your capabilities to round out this great and marvelous organization, which is the Church and kingdom of God. I bear testimony before the entire world of your worth, of your grace and goodness, of your remarkable abilities and tremendous contributions, and I invoke the blessings of heaven upon you, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

THE JOY OF LIVING THE GREAT PLAN OF HAPPINESS



Elder Richard G. Scott

*Of the Quorum
of the Twelve Apostles*

*In Conference Report,
Oct. 1996, 100–104;
or Ensign, Nov. 1996,
73–75*

God's Great Plan of Happiness

The scriptures record, "And I, God, created man . . . ; male and female created I them."¹ This was done spiritually in your premortal existence when you lived in the presence of your Father in Heaven. Your gender existed before you came to earth. You elected to have this earth experience as part of His plan for you. The prophets call it "the plan of mercy,"² the "eternal plan of deliverance,"³ "the plan of salvation,"⁴ and, yes, "the great plan of happiness."⁵ You were taught this plan before you came to earth and there rejoiced in the privilege of participating in it.

Obedience to the plan is a requisite for full happiness in this life and a continuation of eternal joy beyond the veil. Essential to His plan of happiness is agency—the right of personal choice. Also fundamental is the holy privilege of procreation to be exercised

within the commitment of legal marriage. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. The family is ordained of God.⁶ As husband and wife, you have the responsibility to bear children and to nurture and train them spiritually, emotionally, and physically.⁷

Satan also has a plan. It is a cunning, evil, subtle plan of destruction.⁸ It is his objective to take captive the children of Father in Heaven and with every possible means frustrate the great plan of happiness.

Importance of Marriage in God's Plan

Our Heavenly Father endowed His sons and daughters with unique traits especially fitted for their individual responsibilities as they fulfill His plan. To follow His plan requires that you do those things He expects of you as a son or daughter, husband or wife. Those roles are different but entirely compatible. In the Lord's plan, it takes two—a man and a woman—to form a whole. Indeed, a husband and wife are not two identical halves, but a wondrous, divinely determined combination of complementary capacities and characteristics.

Marriage allows these different characteristics to come together in oneness—in unity—to bless a husband and wife, their children and grandchildren. For the greatest happiness and productivity in life, both husband and wife are needed. Their efforts interlock and are complementary. Each has individual traits that best fit the role the Lord has defined for happiness as a man or woman. When used as the Lord intends, those capacities allow a married couple to think, act, and rejoice as one—to face challenges together and overcome them as one, to grow in love and understanding, and through temple ordinances to be bound together as one whole, eternally. That is the plan.

Learn from the Lives of Adam and Eve

You can learn how to be more effective parents by studying the lives of Adam and Eve. Adam was Michael who helped create the earth—a glorious, superb individual. Eve was his equal—a full, powerfully contributing partner. After they had partaken of the fruit, the Lord spoke with them. Their comments reveal some different characteristics of a man and woman. To Adam He said, "Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that

***In the Lord's plan,
it takes two—a
man and a
woman—to form
a whole.***

thou shouldst not eat?"⁹ Now, Adam's response was characteristic of a man who wants to be perceived as being as close to right as possible. Adam responded, "The woman thou gavest me, and commandest that she should remain with me, she gave me of the fruit of the tree and I did eat."¹⁰ And the Lord said unto Eve, "What is this thing which thou hast done?"¹¹ Eve's response was characteristic of a woman. Her answer was very simple and straightforward: "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat."¹²

Later, "Adam blessed God . . . and began to prophesy concerning all the families of the earth, saying: Blessed be the name of God, for because of *my* transgression *my* eyes are opened, and in this life

I shall have joy, and again in the flesh I shall see God."¹³ Adam was thinking about his responsibilities. He was trying to align his performance with the desires of the Lord. Eve said, "Were it not for *our* transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of *our* redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto *all* the

obedient."¹⁴ Eve's response was characteristic of a woman. She embraced all, wanted to make sure that everyone was considered. One response was not more correct than the other. The two perspectives resulted from the traits inherent in men and women. The Lord intends that we use those differences to fulfill His plan for happiness, personal growth, and development. By counseling together they arrived at a broader, more correct understanding of truth.

They worked together.¹⁵ They obeyed the commandment to have children.¹⁶ They knew the plan of happiness and followed it, even though at times it resulted in hardship and difficulty for them.

They were commanded, "Thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore."¹⁷ And they did. Further, they taught their children the plan of happiness.¹⁸ They worked together to overcome challenges,¹⁹ and they "ceased not to call upon God."²⁰

Because Adam and Eve were obedient, the Holy Ghost led them. As husband and wife, you can receive direction in your lives by qualifying for the gift of the Holy Ghost through obedience to the teachings of the Savior.

Roles of Wife and Mother

Beware of the subtle ways Satan employs to take you from the plan of God²¹ and true happiness. One of Satan's most effective approaches is to demean the role of wife and mother in the home. This is an attack at the very heart of God's plan to foster love between husband and wife and to nurture children in an atmosphere of understanding, peace, appreciation, and support. Much of the violence that is rampant in the world today is the harvest of weakened homes. Government and social plans will not effectively correct that, nor can the best efforts of schools and churches fully compensate for the absence of the tender care of a compassionate mother and wife in the home.

This morning President Hinckley spoke of the importance of a mother in the home. Study his message. As a mother guided by the Lord, you weave a fabric of character in your children from threads of truth through careful instruction and worthy example. You imbue the traits of honesty, faith in God, duty, respect for others, kindness, self-confidence, and the desire to contribute, to learn, and to give in your trusting children's minds and hearts. No day-care center can do that. It is your sacred right and privilege. Of course, as a woman you can do exceptionally well in the workplace, but is that the best use of your divinely appointed talents and feminine traits? As a husband, don't encourage your wife to go to work to help in your divinely appointed responsibility of providing resources for the family, if you can possibly avoid it. As the prophets have counseled, to the extent possible with the help of the Lord, as parents, work together to keep Mother in the home.²² Your presence there will strengthen the self-confidence of your children and decrease the chance of emotional challenges. Moreover, as you teach truth by word and example, those children will come to understand who they are and what they can obtain as divine children of Father in Heaven.

Blessings to Be Given in the Lord's Time

I know I have been speaking of the ideal, and you may be disturbed because your life may not now fit that mold. I promise you that through your obedience and continuing faith in Jesus Christ and your understanding of the whole plan of happiness, even if important parts of it aren't fulfilled in your life now, they will be yours in the Lord's due time. I also

promise you that you can have significant growth and happiness now in your present circumstances. As a daughter or son of God, live whatever portion of the plan you can to the best of your ability.

Your desire to be a wife and mother may not have its total fulfillment here, but it will in His time as you live in faith and obedience to merit it.²³ Don't be lured away from the plan of our God²⁴ to the ways of the world, where motherhood is belittled, femininity is decried, and the divinely established role of wife and mother is mocked. Let the world go its way. You follow the plan of the Lord for the greatest measure of true, eternal achievement and the fullest happiness. The lack of promised blessings for which you qualify will be fully rectified in this life or in the next.²⁵

Gratitude for What Women Are and Do

I often interview strong priesthood leaders. When these men speak of their wives, it is with deep tenderness and obvious appreciation. Often, tears flow. Their comments include, "She is more spiritual, purer, and more committed than I," "She motivates me to be a better person," "She is the strength of my life," and "I couldn't do it without her." As a woman, please don't judge how worthwhile, needed, and loved you are by our inept ability to express our true feelings. Your divinely conferred trait of giving of self without counting the cost leads you to underestimate your own worth.

I humbly thank our Father in Heaven for His daughters, you who were willing to come to earth to live under such uncertain circumstances. Most men could not handle the uncertainties you are asked to live with. Social customs require that you wait to be asked for marriage. You are expected to go with your husband wherever his employment or call takes him. Your environment and neighborhood are determined by his ability to provide, meager or not. You place your life in the Lord's hands each time you bear a child. Men make no such sacrifice. The blessing of nurturing children and caring for a husband often is intermingled with many routine tasks. But you do all of these things willingly because you are a woman. Generally you have no idea of how truly wonderful and capable you are, how very much appreciated and loved, or how desperately needed, for most men don't tell you as completely and as often as needed.

How to Attain Happiness

How can you receive the greatest happiness and blessings from this earth experience?

- Learn the doctrinal foundation of the great plan of happiness by studying the scriptures, pondering their content, and praying to understand them. Carefully study and use the proclamation of the First Presidency and the Twelve on the family.²⁶ It was inspired of the Lord.
- Listen to the voice of current and past prophets. Their declarations are inspired. You may verify that counsel in your own mind and heart by praying about it as it applies to your special circumstances. Ask the Lord to confirm your choices, and accept accountability for them.
- Obey the inner feelings that come as promptings from the Holy Ghost. Those feelings are engendered by your righteous thoughts and acts and your determination to seek the will of the Lord and to live it.
- When needed, seek counsel and guidance from parents and your priesthood leaders.

A choice mother wrote: "How did the pioneer women . . . respond to the challenges of their day? They *listened* to their prophet's voice and *followed* him because they *knew* he spoke the will of the Lord. They met the challenges and reaped great blessings because of their faith and obedience. Their first priorities were not security, nice homes, or an easy life. . . . No sacrifice was too great for them to make for their precious husbands and children."²⁷

I obviously don't know what it feels like to be a woman, but I do know what it is to love one with all of my heart and soul. I constantly express to the Lord overflowing gratitude for the unending blessings that flow to our children and so abundantly to me from the life of one of His precious daughters. I want the happiness we have found together to be yours. The more closely you personally adhere to His plan for you on earth, the greater will be your happiness, fulfillment, and progress; the more qualified you will be to receive the rewards He has promised for obedience. I so testify, for the Savior lives and He loves you. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Moses 2:27. See also Moses 2:28; 3:5; James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (1965–75), 4:303; James E. Talmage, *Millennial Star*, 24 Aug. 1922, 539.
2. Alma 42:15.
3. 2 Nephi 11:5.
4. Moses 6:62.
5. Alma 42:8.
6. See "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
7. See "Proclamation," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
8. See 2 Nephi 9:8–9; Alma 12:4–5; Helaman 2:8; 3 Nephi 1:16; Doctrine and Covenants 10:12, 23.
9. Moses 4:17.
10. Moses 4:18.
11. Moses 4:19.
12. Moses 4:19.
13. Moses 5:10; italics added.
14. Moses 5:11; italics added.
15. See Moses 5:1.
16. See Moses 5:2.
17. Moses 5:8.
18. See Moses 5:12.
19. See Moses 5:13.
20. Moses 5:16.
21. 2 Nephi 9:13.
22. See Spencer W. Kimball, San Antonio fireside, 3 Dec. 1977, 32.
23. See Gordon B. Hinckley, in Conference Report, Apr. 1991, 94; or *Ensign*, May 1991, 71.
24. See 2 Nephi 9:13.
25. See Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (1954–56), 2:76.
26. See "Proclamation," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
27. Jeanene W. Scott, BYU Women's Conference, 6 Apr. 1989, 1.

WE ARE WOMEN OF GOD



Sister Sheri L. Dew

*Second Counselor
in the Relief Society
General Presidency
Ensign, Nov. 1999,
97-99*

Recently a professional assignment required me to travel out of the country. But I felt such a foreboding about the trip that prior to leaving I sought a priesthood blessing. I was warned that the adversary would attempt to thwart my mission and that physical and spiritual danger lay ahead. I was also counseled that this was not to be a sight-seeing or a shopping trip and that if I would focus on my assignments and seek the direction of the Spirit, I would return safely home.

Well, the warning was sobering. But as I proceeded, pleading for direction and protection each step of the way, I realized that my experience wasn't all that unique. Might not our Father have said to you and to me as we left His presence: "The adversary will attempt to thwart your mission, and you will face spiritual and physical danger. But if you will focus on your assignments, if you will heed my voice, and if you will refuse to reduce mortality to a sight-seeing or a shopping trip, you will return safely home"?

The adversary is delighted when we act like sightseers, meaning those who are hearers rather than doers of the word (see James 1:22), or shoppers, meaning those preoccupied with the vain things of this world that suffocate our spirits. Satan baits us with perishable pleasures and preoccupations—our bank accounts, our wardrobes, even our waistlines—for he knows that where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also (see Matt. 6:21). Unfortunately, it is easy to let the blinding glare of the adversary's enticements distract us from the light of Christ. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Matt. 16:26).

Prophets have admonished us to forsake the world and turn our hearts to Jesus Christ, who promised

us, "In this world your joy is *not* full, but in *me* your joy is full" (D&C 101:36; emphasis added). Said President Spencer W. Kimball, "If we insist on spending all our time and resources building up . . . a worldly kingdom, that is exactly what we will inherit" ("The False Gods We Worship," *Ensign*, June 1976, 6). How often are we so focused on pursuing the so-called good life that we lose sight of eternal life? It is the fatal spiritual equivalent of selling our birthright for a mess of pottage.

The Lord revealed the remedy for such spiritual disaster when He counseled Emma Smith to "lay aside the things of this world, and seek for the things of a better" (D&C 25:10). And Christ provided the pattern, declaring prior to Gethsemane, "I have

overcome the world" (John 16:33; emphasis added). The only way that we may overcome the world is by coming unto Christ. And coming unto Christ means walking away from the world. It means placing Christ and Christ only at the center of our lives so that the vanities and philosophies of men lose their addictive appeal. Satan is the god of Babylon, or this world. Christ is the God of Israel, and His Atonement gives us power to overcome the world. "If you expect

glory, intelligence and endless lives," said President Joseph F. Smith, "*let the world go*" (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* [1998], 243; emphasis added).

As sisters in Zion we can be obstacles to the adversary's conspiracy against families and virtue. No wonder he tempts us to settle for earthly pleasures rather than to seek for eternal glory. A 45-year-old mother of six told me recently that when she stopped poring over magazines that plagued her with images of how her home and wardrobe should look, she began to feel more at peace. She said, "I may be chubby, gray, and wrinkled, but I am a chubby, gray, wrinkled daughter of God, who knows me and loves me."

Relief Society can help us turn away from the world, for its express purpose is to help sisters and their families come unto Christ. In that spirit, I join Sister Smoot and Sister Jensen in declaring who we are and in rejoicing in the announced refinements in Relief Society's focus. We no longer have the luxury of spending our energy on anything that

***Coming unto
Christ means . . .
placing Christ and
Christ only at the
center of our lives
so that the vanities
and philosophies of
men lose their
addictive appeal.***

does not lead us and our families to Christ. That is the litmus test for Relief Society, as well as for our lives. In the days ahead, a casual commitment to Christ will not carry us through.

As a young girl I saw commitment in my grandmother, who helped Grandpa homestead our farm on the Kansas prairie. Somehow they outlasted the Dust Bowl, the Depression, and the tornadoes that terrorize the Great Plains. I've often wondered how Grandma put up with years of meager income and hard work and how she went on when her oldest son died in a tragic accident. Grandma's life wasn't easy. But do you know what I remember most about her? Her total joy in the gospel. She was never happier than when she was working on family history or teaching with her scriptures in hand. Grandma *had* laid aside the things of this world to seek for the things of a better.

To the world, my grandma was ordinary. But to me, she represents the unsung heroines of *this* century who lived up to their premortal promises and left a foundation of faith upon which we may build. Grandma wasn't perfect, but she was a woman of God. Now it is for you and for me to carry forward the banner into the next century. *We are not women of the world.*

We are women of God. And women of God will be among the greatest heroines of the 21st century. As President Joseph F. Smith proclaimed, it is not for us "to be led by the women of the world; it is for [us] to lead . . . the women of the world, in everything that is praise-worthy" (*Teachings*, 184).

This is not to diminish the lives of countless good women throughout the world. *But we are unique.* We are unique because of our covenants, our spiritual privileges, and the responsibilities attached to both. We are endowed with power and gifted with the Holy Ghost. We have a *living* prophet to guide us, ordinances that bind us to the Lord and to each other, and the power of the priesthood in our midst. We understand where we stand in the great plan of happiness. And we know that God is our Father and that His Son is our unfailing Advocate.

With these privileges comes great responsibility, for "unto whom much is given much is required" (D&C 82:3), and at times the demands of discipleship are heavy. But shouldn't we expect the journey

towards eternal glory to stretch us? We sometimes rationalize our preoccupation with this world and our casual attempts to grow spiritually by trying to console each other with the notion that living the gospel really shouldn't require all that much of us. The Lord's standard of behavior will always be more demanding than the world's, but then the Lord's rewards are infinitely more glorious—including true joy, peace, and salvation.

How then do we, as women of God, fill the full measure of our creation? The Lord rewards "them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6). We seek Him not only by studying and searching, by pleading and praying and watching always lest we enter into temptation, but by giving up worldly indulgences that straddle the line between God and mammon. Otherwise we risk being called but not chosen because our "hearts are set so much upon the things of this world" (D&C 121:35).

Consider the principle taught in the sequence of this scriptural injunction: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy *heart*, with all thy might, mind, and strength" (D&C 59:5; emphasis added). What the Lord requires first is our hearts. Imagine how our choices would be affected if we loved the Savior above all else.

How we would spend our time and money, or dress on a hot summer day, or respond to the call to visit teach and take care of one another, or react to media that offend the Spirit.

It is by letting the world go and coming unto Christ that we increasingly live as women of God. We were born for eternal glory. Just as faithful men were foreordained to hold the priesthood, we were foreordained to be women of God. We *are* women of faith, virtue, vision, and charity who rejoice in motherhood and in womanhood and in the family. We are not panicked about perfection, but we *are* working to become more pure. And we know that in the strength of the Lord we can do all righteous things because we have immersed ourselves in His gospel (see Alma 26:12). *I repeat, we cannot be women of the world, for we are latter-day women of God.* As President Kimball taught, "No greater recognition can come to [us] in this world than to be known as [women] of God" ("The Role of Righteous Women," *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, 102).

The Lord's standard of behavior will always be more demanding than the world's, but then the Lord's rewards are infinitely more glorious.

This summer I had an unforgettable experience in the Holy Land. As I sat on the Mount of Beatitudes overlooking the Sea of Galilee, I saw in the distance a city built on a hill. The visual image of a city that cannot be hid was stunning, and as I pondered the symbolism I had an overwhelming impression that we as women of God are like that city, that if we will leave behind the things of the world and come unto Christ so that the Spirit radiates through our lives and from our eyes, our uniqueness will be a light unto the world. As sisters of Relief Society, we belong to the most significant community of women on this side of the veil. We *are* a spectacular city on a hill. And the less we look and act like the women of the world, the more they will look to us as a wellspring of hope, peace, virtue, and joy.

Twenty years ago at this very meeting President Kimball made a statement we have quoted ever since: "Much of the major growth that is coming to the Church in the last days . . . will happen to the degree that the women of the Church reflect righteousness and articulateness in their lives and to the degree that [they] are seen as *distinct* and *different*—in happy ways—from the women of the world" (*Ensign*, Nov. 1979, 103–4; emphasis added). We can no longer be content to just quote President Kimball. We are the sisters who must and will make his prophecy a reality. But we can do it. I know we can.

President Gordon B. Hinckley said recently that "the eternal salvation of the world . . . rests upon the shoulders of this Church. . . . No other people in the history of the world have received . . . [a] more compelling mandate . . . , and we'd better be getting at it" ("Church Is Really Doing Well," *Church News*, 3 July 1999, 3).

Women of God, that includes us. Tonight I invite each of us to identify at least one thing we can do to come out of the world and come closer to Christ. And then next month, another. And then another. Sisters, this is a call to arms, it's a call to action, a call to arise. A call to arm ourselves with power and with righteousness. A call to rely on the arm of the Lord rather than the arm of flesh. A call to "arise and shine forth, that [our] light may be a standard for the nations" (D&C 115:5). A call to *live* as women of God so that we and our families may return safely home.

We have such cause to rejoice, for the gospel of Jesus Christ *is* the voice of gladness! It is because the Savior overcame the world that we may overcome. It is because He rose on the third day that we may arise as

women of God. May we lay aside the things of this world and seek for the things of a better. May we commit this very hour to come out of the world and to never look back. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

"ONE THING NEEDFUL": BECOMING WOMEN OF GREATER FAITH IN CHRIST



Sister Patricia T. Holland

*Former Young Women
General Presidency*

*Ensign,
Oct. 1987,
26–33*

Just after my release from the Young Women general presidency in April 1986, I had the opportunity to spend a week in Israel. It had been a very difficult and demanding two years for me. Being a good mother with ample time to succeed at that task has always been my first priority, so I had tried to be a full-time mother to a grade-schooler, a high-schooler, and a son preparing for his mission. I had also tried to be a full-time wife to a staggeringly busy university president. And I had to be as much of a full-time counselor in that general presidency as one living fifty miles from the office could be. But in an important period of forming principles and starting programs, I worried that I wasn't doing enough—and I tried to run a little faster.

Toward the end of my two-year term, my health was going downhill. I was losing weight steadily, and I wasn't sleeping well. My husband and children were trying to bandage me together even as I was trying to do the same for them. We were exhausted. And yet, I kept wondering what I might have done to manage it all better. The Brethren, always compassionate, were watching, and extended a loving release. As grateful as my family was for the conclusion of my term of service, I nevertheless felt a loss of association—and, I confess, some loss of identity—with those women that I had come to love so much. Who was I, and where was I in this welter of demands? Should life be as hard as all this? How successful had I been in my several and competing assignments? Or had I muffed them all? The days after my release were about as difficult as the weeks before it. I didn't have any reserve to call

on. My tank was on empty, and I wasn't sure there was a filling station anywhere in sight.

It was just a few weeks later that my husband had the assignment in Jerusalem to which I have referred, and the Brethren traveling on the assignment requested that I accompany him. "Come on," he said. "You can recuperate in the Savior's land of living water and bread of life." As weary as I was, I packed my bags, believing—or, at the very least, hoping—that the time there would be a healing respite.

On a pristinely clear and beautifully bright day, I sat overlooking the Sea of Galilee and reread the tenth chapter of Luke. But instead of the words on the page, I thought I saw with my mind and heard with my heart these words: "[Pat, Pat, Pat], thou art careful and troubled about many things." Then the power of pure and personal revelation seized me as I read, "But one thing [only one thing] is [truly] needful." (Vs. 40–41.)

The May sun in Israel is so bright you feel as if you are sitting on top of the world. I had just visited the spot in Bethoron where the sun stood still for Joshua (see Josh. 10:12), and indeed, on that day, it seemed so for me as well. As I sat pondering my problems I felt that same sun's healing rays like warm liquid pouring into my heart—relaxing, calming, and comforting my troubled soul.

Our loving Father in Heaven seemed to be whispering to me, "You don't have to worry over so many things. The one thing that is needful—the *only* thing that is truly needful—is to keep your eyes toward the sun—my Son." Suddenly I had true peace. I knew that my life had always been in his hands—from the very beginning! The sea lying peacefully before my eyes had been tempest-tossed and dangerous—many, many times. All I needed to do was to renew my faith, and get a firm grasp on his hand—and *together* we could walk on the water.

I would like to pose a question for each of us to ponder. How do we as women make that quantum leap from being troubled and worried to being women of even greater faith? One frame of mind surely seems to negate the other. Faith and fear cannot long coexist. Consider some of the things that trouble us.

I have served as a Relief Society president in four different wards. Two of these wards were for single women, and two were wards with many young mothers. As I sat in counsel with my single sisters,

my heart often ached as they described to me their feelings of loneliness and disappointment. They felt that their lives had no meaning or purpose in a church that rightly puts so much emphasis on marriage and family life. Most painful of all was the occasional suggestion that their singleness was their own fault—or worse yet, a selfish desire. They were anxiously seeking for peace and purpose—something of real value to which they could dedicate their lives.

Yet it seemed to me that the young mothers had easily as many concerns. They described to me the struggles of trying to raise children in an increasingly difficult world, of never having enough time or means or freedom to feel like a person of value because they were always stretched to the ragged edge of survival. And there were so few tangible evidences that what they were doing was really going to be successful. There was no one to give them a raise in pay; and beyond their husbands (who may or may not remember to do it), no one to compliment them on a job well done. And they were always tired! The one thing I remember so vividly with these young mothers was that they were *always* so tired.

Then there were those women who, through no fault of their own, found themselves the sole provider for their homes financially, spiritually, emotionally, and in every other way. I could not even comprehend the challenges they faced. Obviously, in some ways, theirs was the most demanding circumstance of all. The perspective I have gained over these many years of listening to the worries of women is that no one woman or group of women—single, married, divorced, widowed, homemakers, or professionals—have cornered the market on concerns. There seem to be plenty of challenges to go around. But, I hasten to add, there are marvelous blessings as well.

Every one of us has privileges and blessings, and every one of us has fears and trials. It seems bold to say, but common sense suggests that never before in the history of the world have women, including LDS women, been faced with greater complexity in their concerns.

I am very appreciative of the added awareness that the women's movement has given to a gospel principle we have had since Mother Eve and before—that of agency, the right to choose.

But one of the most unfortunate side effects we have faced in this matter of agency is that, because of the increasing diversity of life-styles for women

of today, we seem even more uncertain and less secure with each other. We are not getting closer, but further away from that sense of community and sisterhood that has sustained us and given us strength for generations. There seems to be an increase in our competitiveness and a decrease in our generosity with one another.

Those who have the time and energy to can their fruit and vegetables develop a skill that will serve them well in time of need—and in our uncertain economy, that could be almost any time. But they shouldn't look down their noses at those who buy their peaches or who don't like zucchini in any of the thirty-five ways there are to disguise it, or who have simply made a conscious choice to use their time and energy in some other purposeful way.

And where am I in all of this? For three-fourths of my life I felt threatened to the core because I hated to sew. Now, I *can* sew; if it is absolutely necessary, I *will* sew—but I hate it. Can you imagine my burden over the last twenty-five or thirty years, “faking it” in Relief Society sessions and trying to smile when six little girls walk into church all pinafored and laced and ribboned and petticoated—in identical, hand-sewn dresses, all trooping ahead of their mother, who has a similar outfit? I don’t necessarily consider my attitude virtuous, lovely, of good report or praiseworthy, but I’m honest in my antipathy toward sewing.

I have grown up a little since those days in at least two ways: I now genuinely admire a mother who can do that for her children, and I have ceased feeling guilty that sewing is not particularly rewarding to me. The point is, we simply cannot call ourselves Christian and continue to judge one another—or ourselves—so harshly. No mason jar of bing cherries is worth a confrontation that robs us of our compassion and our sisterhood.

Obviously the Lord has created us with different personalities, as well as differing degrees of energy, interest, health, talent, and opportunity. So long as we are committed to righteousness and living a life of faithful devotion, we should celebrate these divine differences, knowing they are a gift from God.

We must not feel so frightened, so threatened and insecure; we must not need to find exact replicas of ourselves in order to feel validated as women of worth. There are many things over which we can be divided, but *one* thing is needful for our unity—the empathy and compassion of the living Son of God.

I was married in 1963, the very year Betty Friedan published her society-shaking book, *The Feminine Mystique*, so as an adult woman I can only look back with childhood memories of the gentler 1940s and 50s. But it must have been much more comfortable to have a life-style already prepared for you, and neighbors on either side whose lives gave you role models for your own. However, it must have been even that much more painful for those who, through no fault of their own, were single then, or had to work, or struggled with a broken family. Now, in our increasingly complex world, that earlier model is fragmented, and we seem to be even less sure of who we are and where we are going.

Surely there has not been another time in history when women have questioned their self-worth as harshly and critically as in the second half of the twentieth century. Many women are searching, almost frantically, as never before, for a sense of personal purpose and meaning; and many LDS women are searching, too, for eternal insight and meaning in their femaleness.

If I were Satan and wanted to destroy a society, I think I would stage a full-blown blitz on women. I would keep them so distraught and distracted that they would never find the calming strength and serenity for which their sex has always been known.

Satan has effectively done that, catching us in the crunch of trying to be superhuman instead of striving to reach our unique, God-given potential within such diversity. He tauntingly teases us that if we don’t have it all—fame, fortune, families, and fun, and have it all the time—we have been short-changed and are second-class citizens in the race of life. As a sex we are struggling, our families are struggling, and our society is struggling. Drugs, teenage pregnancies, divorce, family violence, and suicide are some of the ever-increasing side effects of our collective life in the express lane.

Too many of us are struggling and suffering, too many are running faster than they have strength, expecting *too* much of themselves. As a result, we are experiencing new and undiagnosed stress-related illnesses. The Epstein-Barr virus, for one, has come into our popular medical jargon as the malady of the 1980s. “[The victims] are plagued by low-grade fevers, aching joints, and sometimes a sore throat—but they don’t have the flu. They’re overwhelmingly exhausted, weak, and debilitated—but they don’t have AIDS. They’re often confused and forgetful—

but it isn't Alzheimer's. Many patients feel suicidal, but it isn't clinical depression. . . . Female victims outnumber males about 3 to 1, and a great many are intelligent high achievers with stressful lives." (*Newsweek*, Oct. 27, 1986, p. 105.)

We *must* have the courage to be imperfect while striving for perfection. We *must* not allow our own guilt, the feminist books, the talk-show hosts, or the whole media culture to sell us a bill of goods—or rather a bill of *no* goods. We can become so sidetracked in our compulsive search for identity and self-esteem that we really believe it *can* be found in having perfect figures or academic degrees or professional status or even absolute motherly success. Yet, in so searching externally, we can be torn from our true internal, eternal selves. We often worry so much about pleasing and performing for others that we lose our uniqueness—that full and relaxed acceptance of one's self as a person of worth and individuality. We become so frightened and insecure that we cannot be generous toward the diversity and individuality, and yes, problems, of our neighbors. Too many women with these anxieties watch helplessly as their lives unravel from the very core that centers and sustains them. Too many are like a ship at sea without sail or rudder, "tossed to and fro," as the Apostle Paul said (see Eph. 4:14), until more and more of us are genuinely, rail-grabbingly seasick.

Where is the sureness that allows us to sail our ship, whatever winds may blow, with the master seaman's triumphant cry, "Steady as she goes"? Where is the inner stillness we so cherish and for which our sex traditionally has been known?

I believe we can find our steady footing and stilling of the soul by turning away from physical preoccupations, superwoman accomplishments, and endless popularity contests, and returning instead to the wholeness of our soul, that unity in our very being that balances the demanding and inevitable diversity of life.

One woman, not of our faith, whose writings I love, is Anne Morrow Lindbergh. She comments on the female despair and general torment of our times:

"The Feminists did not look . . . far [enough] ahead; they laid down no rules of conduct. For them it was enough to demand the privileges. . . . And [so] woman today is still searching. We are aware of our hunger and needs, but still ignorant of what will

satisfy them. With our garnered free time, we are more apt to drain our creative springs than to refill them. With our pitchers [in hand] we attempt . . . to water a field, [instead of] a garden. We throw ourselves indiscriminately into the committees and causes. Not knowing how to feed the spirit, we try to muffle its demands in distractions. Instead of stilling the center, the axis of the wheel, we add more centrifugal activities to our lives—which tend to throw us [yet more] off balance.

"Mechanically we have gained, in the last generation, but spiritually we have . . . lost."

Regardless of the time period, she adds, "[for women] the problem is [still] how to feed the soul." (*Gift from the Sea*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1975, pp. 51–52.)

I have pondered long and hard about the feeding of our inner self amidst too many troublesome things. It is no coincidence that we speak of feeding the spirit, just as we would speak of feeding the body. We need constant nourishment for both. The root word *hale* (as in "hale and hearty") is the common root to words like *whole*, *health*, *heal*, and *holy*. President Benson recently said, "There is no question that the health of the body affects the spirit, or the Lord would never have revealed the Word of Wisdom. God has never given any *temporal* commandments—and that which affects our stature affects our soul." We need so much for body, mind, and spirit to unite in one healthy, stable soul.

Surely God is well balanced, so perhaps we are just that much closer to Him when we are. In any case, I like the link between *hale*, *whole*, *health*, *heal*, and *holy*. Our unity of soul within diversity of circumstance—our "stilling of the center"—is worth any effort.

Often we fail to consider the glorious possibility within our own souls. We need to remember that divine promise, "The Kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:21.) Perhaps we forget that the kingdom of God is within us because too much attention is given to this outer shell, this human body of ours, and the frail, too-flimsy world in which it moves.

Permit me to share with you an analogy that I created from something I read years ago. It helped me then—and helps me still—in my examination of inner strength and spiritual growth.

The analogy is of a soul—a human soul, with all of its splendor—being placed in a beautifully carved but very tightly locked box. Reigning in majesty

and illuminating our soul in this innermost box is our Lord and our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, the living Son of the living God. This box is then placed—and locked—inside another, larger one, and so on until five beautifully carved but very securely locked boxes await the woman who is skillful and wise enough to open them. In order for her to have free communication with the Lord, she must find the key to and unlock the contents of these boxes. Success will then reveal to her the beauty and divinity of her own soul and her gifts and her grace as a daughter of God.

For me, *prayer* is the key to the first box. We kneel to ask help for our tasks and then arise to find that the first lock is now open. But this ought not to seem just a convenient and contrived miracle, for if we are to search for real light and eternal certainties, we have to pray as the ancients prayed. We are women now, not children, and we are expected to pray with maturity. The words most often used to describe urgent, prayerful labor are *wrestle*, *plead*, *cry*, and *hunger*. In some sense, prayer may be the hardest work we ever will engage in, and perhaps it should be. It is pivotal protection against becoming so involved with worldly possessions and honors and status that we no longer desire to undertake the search for our soul.

For those who, like Enos, pray in faith and gain entrance to a new dimension of their potential divinity, they are led to box number two. Here our prayers alone do not seem to be sufficient. We must turn to the scriptures for God's long-recorded teachings about our souls. We must learn. Surely every woman in this church is under divine obligation to learn and grow and develop. We are God's diverse array of unburnished talents, and we must not bury these gifts or hide our light. If the glory of God is intelligence, then learning, especially learning from the scriptures, stretches us toward him.

He uses many metaphors for divine influence, such as "living water" and "the bread of life." I have discovered that if my own progress stalls, it stalls from malnutrition born of not eating and drinking daily from his holy writ. There have been challenges in my life that would have completely destroyed me had I not had the scriptures both on my bedstand and in my purse so that I could partake of them day and night at a moment's notice. Meeting God in

scripture has been like a divine intravenous feeding for me—a celestial IV that my son once described as an *angelical* cord. So box two is opened through *learning from the scriptures*. I have discovered that by studying them I can have, again and again, an exhilarating encounter with God.

However, at the beginning of such success in emancipating the soul, Lucifer becomes more anxious, especially as we approach box number three. He knows that we are about to learn one very important and fundamental principle—that to truly find ourselves we must lose ourselves—so he begins to block our increased efforts to love God, our neighbor, and ourselves. Through the last decade, Satan has enticed all humanity to engage almost all of their energies in the pursuit of romantic love or thing-love or excessive self-love. In so doing, we forget that appropriate self-love and self-esteem are the promised reward for putting others first. "Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it." (Luke 17:33.) Box three opens only to the key of *charity*.

With charity, real growth and genuine insight begin. But the lid to box four seems nearly impossible to penetrate. Unfortunately, the faint-hearted and fearful often turn back here. The going seems too difficult, the lock too secure. This is a time for self-evaluation. To see ourselves as we really are often brings pain, but it is only through true humility, repentance, and renewal that we will come to know God. "Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart," he said. (Matt. 11:29.) We must be patient with ourselves as we overcome weaknesses, and we must remember to rejoice over all that is good in us. This will strengthen our inner selves and leave us less dependent on outward acclaim. When our souls pay less attention to public praise, they then also care very little about public disapproval. Competition

and jealousy and envy now begin to have no meaning. Just imagine the powerful spirit that would exist in our female society if we finally arrived at the point where, like our Savior, our real desire was to be counted as the *least* among our sisters. The rewards here are of such profound strength and quiet triumph of faith that we are carried into an even brighter sphere. So the fourth box, unlike the others, is broken open, just as a

**We must be patient
with ourselves as
we overcome
weaknesses, and
we must remember
to rejoice over all
that is good in us.**

contrite heart is broken. *We are reborn*—like a flower growing and blooming out of the broken crust of the earth.

To share with you my feelings of opening the fifth box, I must compare the beauty of our souls with the holiness of our temples. There, in a setting not of this world, where fashions and position and professions go unrecognized, we have our chance to find peace and serenity and stillness that will anchor our soul forever, for there we may find God. For those of us who, like the brother of Jared, have the courage and faith to break through the veil into that sacred center of existence (see Ether 3:6–19), we will find the brightness of the final box brighter than the noonday sun. There we find wholeness—holiness. That is what it says over the entrance to the fifth box: *Holiness to the Lord*. “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?” (1 Cor. 3:16.) I testify that you are holy—that divinity is abiding within you waiting to be uncovered—to be unleashed and magnified and demonstrated.

I have heard it said by some that the reason women in the Church struggle to know themselves is because they don't have a divine female role model. But we do. We believe we have a mother in heaven. May I quote from President Spencer W. Kimball in a general conference address:

“When we sing that doctrinal hymn . . . ‘O My Father,’ we get a sense of the ultimate in maternal modesty, of the restrained, queenly elegance of our Heavenly Mother, and knowing how profoundly our mortal mothers have shaped us here, do we suppose her influence on us as individuals to be less?” (*Ensign*, May 1978, p. 6.)

I have never questioned why our mother in heaven seems veiled to us, for I believe the Lord has his reasons for revealing as little as he has on that subject. Furthermore, I believe we know much more about our eternal nature than we think we do; and it is our sacred obligation to express our knowledge, to teach it to our young sisters and daughters, and in so doing to strengthen their faith and help them through the counterfeit confusions of these difficult latter days. Let me point out some examples.

The Lord has not placed us in this lone and dreary world without a blueprint for living. In Doctrine and Covenants 52, we read the Lord's words: “I will give unto you a pattern in *all things*, that ye may not be deceived.” (V. 14; *italics added*.) He certainly

includes us women in that promise. He has given us patterns in the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price; and he has given us patterns in the temple ceremony. As we study these patterns, we must continually ask, “Why does the Lord choose to say these particular words and present it in just this way?” We know he uses metaphors and symbols and parables and allegories to teach us of his eternal ways. We have all recognized the relationship between Abraham and Isaac that so parallels God's anguish over the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ. But, as women, do we stretch ourselves and also ask about Sarah's travail in this experience as well? We need to search in this manner, and we need always to look for deeper meaning. We should look for parallels and symbols. We should look for themes and motifs such as those we would find in a Bach or a Mozart composition, and we should look for repeated patterns.

One obvious pattern is that both the Bible and the Book of Mormon begin with a family theme, including family conflict. I have always believed this symbolized something eternal about *family* far more than just the story of those particular parents or those particular children. Surely all of us—married or single, with children and without—see something of Adam and Eve and something of Cain and Abel every day of our lives. With or without marriage, or with or without children, we all have some of the feelings of Lehi, Sariah, Laman, Nephi, Ruth, Naomi, Esther, the sons of Helaman, and the daughters of Ishmael.

Those are types and shadows for us, prefigurations of our own mortal joys and sorrows, just as Joseph and Mary are, in a sense, types and shadows of parental devotion as they nurtured the Son of God. These all seem to me to be symbols of higher principles and truths, symbols carefully chosen to show us the way, whether we are married or single, young or old, with family or without.

And, obviously, the temple is highly symbolic. May I share an experience I had there a few months ago concerning the careful choice of words and symbols? I have chosen my words carefully so that nothing will be improperly shared outside the temple. My quotations are taken from published scripture.

Maybe it was coincidence (someone has said, “Coincidence is a small miracle in which God chooses to remain anonymous”), but in any case, as I waited in the temple chapel, I sat next to an

elderly man who unexpectedly but sweetly turned to me and said, "If you want a clear picture of the Creation, read Abraham 4." As I started to turn to Abraham, I just happened to brush past Moses 3:5: "For I, the Lord God, created all things, of which I have spoken, spiritually, before they were naturally upon the face of the earth." Another message of prefiguration—a spiritual pattern giving meaning to mortal creations. I then read Abraham 4 carefully and took the opportunity of going to an initiatory session. I left there with greater revelatory light on something I had always known in my heart to be so—that men *and* women are joint heirs of the blessings of the priesthood, and even though men bear the greater burden of administering it, women are not without their priesthood-related responsibilities.

Then, as I attended the endowment session, I asked myself if I were the Lord and could give my children on earth only a simplified but powerfully symbolic example of their roles and missions, how much would I give and where would I start? I listened to every word. I watched for patterns and prototypes.

I quote to you from Abraham 4:27: "So the Gods went down to organize man in their own image, in the image of the Gods to form them him, male *and* female, to form them *them*." (Italics added.) They formed male and they formed female—in the *image of the Gods*, in *their* own image.

Then, in a poignant exchange with God, Adam states that he will call the woman Eve. And why does he call her Eve? "Because she [is] the mother of all living." (Gen. 3:20; Moses 4:26.)

As I tenderly acknowledge the very real pain that many single women, or married women who have not borne children, feel about any discussion of motherhood, could we consider this one possibility about our eternal female identity—our unity in our diversity? Eve was given the identity of "the mother of all living"—years, decades, perhaps centuries before she ever bore a child. It would appear that her *motherhood preceded her maternity*, just as surely as the perfection of the Garden preceded the struggles of mortality. I believe *mother* is one of those very carefully chosen words, one of those rich words—

with meaning after meaning after meaning. We must not, at all costs, let that word divide us. I believe with all my heart that it is first and foremost a statement about our nature, not a head count of our children.

I have only three children and have wept that I could not have more. And I know that some of you without any have wept, too. And sometimes too many have simply been angry over the very subject itself. For the sake of our eternal motherhood, I plead that this not be so. Some women give birth and raise children but never "mother" them. Others, whom I love with all my heart, "mother" all their lives but have never given birth. And all of us are Eve's daughters, whether we are married or single, maternal or barren. We are created in the image of the Gods to become gods and goddesses. And we can provide something of that divine pattern, that maternal prototype, for each other and for those who come after us. Whatever our circumstance, we can reach out, touch, hold, lift, and nurture—but we cannot do it in isolation. We need a community of sisters stilling the soul and binding the wounds of fragmentation.

I know that God loves us individually and collectively *as women*, and that he has a mission for every one of us. As I learned on my Galilean hillside, I testify that if our desires are righteous, God overrules for our good and that heavenly parents will tenderly attend to our needs. In our diversity and individuality, my prayer is that we will be united—united in seeking *our* specific, foreordained mission, united in asking *not*, "What can the kingdom do for me?" but "What can I do for the kingdom? How can I fulfill the measure of *my* creation? In my circumstances and with my challenges and my faith, where is my *full* realization of the godly image in which I was created?"

With faith in God, his prophets, his church, and ourselves—with faith in our own divine creation—may we be peaceful and let go of our cares and troubles over so many things. May we believe—nothing doubting—in the light that shines, even in a dark place.

***I know that
God loves us
individually and
collectively
as women, and
that he has a
mission for every
one of us.***