

# Knowing Who You Are—and Who You Have Always Been

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Sisters, you are just spectacular! You're not perfect, but you are spectacular! From Siberia to Seattle, you have won my heart and my deepest respect. I believe there is more righteous courage and determination inherent within the sisters of this Church today than there has ever been among any group of women who have ever lived. And today I want to tell you why.

Recently, my sixteen-year-old niece Megan and two of her friends came for a sleepover. As we talked that evening, one of them asked me what it had been like growing up on a farm in the olden days. (This is not as bad, however, as what happened a few days ago when a handsome young returned missionary said to me, "Sister Dew, if I were just forty years older . . ." You know, if I ever do get married, I hope my husband does better math than that.) Anyway, I told Megan and her friends that in the "olden days," I had been painfully shy and had absolutely no self-confidence.

"How did you get over feeling that way?" Megan asked. A pat answer was on the tip of my tongue when I stopped, sensing that these terrific young women were receptive to more. So I told them that the reason was a spiritual one: It wasn't until I began to understand how the Lord felt about me that my feelings about myself and my life slowly began to change. Their questions then came in a flurry: How did I *know* how the Lord felt? And how could they find out how He felt about them?

For several hours, scriptures in hand, we talked about how to hear the voice of the Spirit, about how eager the Lord is to unveil the knowledge stored safely inside our spirits concerning who we are and what our mission is, and about the life-changing difference it makes when we know.

My message to you today, my dear sisters, whom I love, is the same: There is nothing more vital to our success and our happiness here than learning to hear the voice of the Spirit. It is the Spirit who reveals to us our identity—which isn't just who we are but who we have always been. And that when we know, our lives take on a sense of purpose so stunning that we can never be the same again.

As a people, we talk and sing constantly about who we are. Three-year-olds know the words to "I Am a Child of God." The Proclamation on the Family declares that we each have a divine destiny. The second Young Women's value is divine nature. And the very first words in the Relief Society Declaration are, "We are beloved spirit daughters of God, and our lives have meaning, purpose, and direction." And yet, with all our talking, do we really believe? Do we really understand? Has this transcendent doctrine about who we are—meaning who we have always been and, therefore, who we may become—permeated our hearts?

Our spirits long for us to remember the truth about who we are, because the way we see ourselves, our sense of identity, affects everything we do. It affects the way we behave, the way we respond to uncertainty, the way we see others, the way we feel about ourselves, and the way we make choices. It affects the very way we live our lives. So, today, I invite you to ponder in a new way not just who you are but who you have always been.

President Lorenzo Snow taught that "Jesus was a god before he came into the world and yet his knowledge was taken from him. He did not know his former greatness, neither do we know what greatness we had attained to before we came here."<sup>1</sup> But President Snow also taught that during the Savior's life "it was revealed unto Him who He was, and for what purpose He was in the world. The glory and power He possessed *before* He came into the world was made known unto Him."<sup>2</sup> Sisters, just as the Savior came to remember and to know exactly who He was, so may we.

Unveiling this knowledge would be easier if we could remember what happened in our premortal life. But we can't. We can't remember the glory of our former home. We have forgotten the language we spoke there and our dear companions with whom we associated. We cannot recall the "first lessons [we learned] in the world of spirits" (D&C 138:56) or the identities of our heavenly tutors. We cannot remember what promises we made to ourselves and to others and to the Lord. Nor can we remember our place in the Lord's heavenly kingdom or the spiritual maturity we achieved there.

There are, however, some remarkable things that we do know. We know that *we were there*, in the heavenly councils before the foundations of this earth were laid. *We were there* when our Father presented His plan, and we saw the Savior chosen and appointed, and we sanctioned it. *We were there* among the heavenly host who sang and shouted for joy (Job 38:7). And when Satan unleashed his fury against the Father and the Son and was cast out of heaven, we were there, fighting on the side of truth. In fact, President George Q. Cannon said that "we stood loyally by God and by Jesus, and . . . *did not flinch*."<sup>3</sup> We believed. We followed. And when we fought for truth in the most bitter of all confrontations, we did not flinch.

Because of our premortal valor, we were chosen to be born into the house of Israel, which lineage President Harold B. Lee called the "most illustrious lineage" of all who would come to earth,<sup>4</sup> and which Elder Bruce R. McConkie said was reserved for those who sought the greatest of all premortal talents, the talent of spirituality.<sup>5</sup>

Now we are here, separated from the safety of our heavenly home, serving a mission in this lone and dreary world—a mission to prove whether or not we want to be part of the kingdom of God more than we want anything else. The Lord is testing our faith and our integrity to see if we will persevere in a realm where Satan reigns. Happily, despite taking this test in the stormy twilight of the dispensation of the fulness of times, we have once again chosen to follow Jesus Christ. We have chosen to follow Him because we remember Him and we recognize Him.

We are among the elect whom the Lord has called during this "eleventh hour" to labor in His vineyard, a vineyard that "has become corrupted every whit" and in which only a few "doeth good" (D&C 33:3-4). We are those few. God, who saw the "end from the beginning" (Abraham 2:8), foresaw perfectly what these times would demand. Thus, said President George Q. Cannon, "God . . . reserved spirits for this dispensation who [would] have the courage and determination to face the world, and all the powers of the evil one," and who would "build up the Zion of our God, fearless of all consequences."<sup>6</sup>

Can you imagine that God, who knew us perfectly, reserved us to come now, when the stakes would be higher and the opposition more intense than ever? When He would need women who would help raise and lead a chosen generation in the most lethal spiritual environment? Can you imagine that He chose us because He knew we would be fearless in building Zion?

I can, because of what the Spirit has repeatedly whispered about you as I have sought the Lord in your behalf during this calling. Though we are sometimes far too casual about our spiritual lives; though we sometimes get distracted by the world and live beneath ourselves-the fact remains that we have always been women of God. We have repeatedly made righteous choices, on both sides of the veil, that demonstrate our faithfulness. We have bound ourselves to the Lord with the most binding covenants of mortality. We have been and are so much more valiant than we think. We have so much more divine potential than we yet comprehend.

The Lord told Abraham that he was among the "noble and great ones" chosen for his earthly mission before he was born (Abraham 3:22-23). And President Joseph F. Smith saw in vision that many-many-choice spirits reserved to come forth in this dispensation were also "among the noble and great" (D&C 138:53, 55). Said Elder Bruce R. McConkie: "A *host* of mighty men and *equally glorious women* comprised that group of the 'noble and great ones.' . . . Can we do other than conclude that Mary and Eve and Sarah and myriads of our faithful sisters were numbered among them? Certainly these sisters . . . fought as valiantly in the War in Heaven as did the brethren, even as they in like manner stand firm . . . in mortality, in the cause of truth and righteousness." [7](#)

So, sisters, what about us? What about you and me? Is it possible that we were among the noble and great?

I have to tell you, I believe it is more than possible. The Prophet Joseph taught that "every man who has a calling to minister to the inhabitants of the world was ordained to that very purpose . . . before this world was." [8](#) President Spencer W. Kimball added that "in the world before we came here, faithful women were given certain assignments." [9](#) I simply cannot imagine that we who have been called to bear and rear and lead and love a chosen generation of children and youth this late in the final dispensation were not among those deemed noble and great.

Noble and great. Courageous and determined. Faithful and fearless. That is who you are, and that is who you have always been. Understanding that truth can change your life, because this knowledge carries a confidence that cannot be duplicated any other way. I doubt many of us feel noble *or* great. But then neither did Enoch, who was stunned when the Lord called him into service: "Why is it that I have found favor in thy sight, and am but a lad, and all the people hate me; for I am slow of speech?" (Moses 6:31). The Lord responded to Enoch by promising to walk with him and give power to his words. This encounter with the Lord gave Enoch a new vision of himself, and the result was magnificent, for so powerful was his word that his people were "taken up into heaven" (Moses 7: 21). But that happened *after* Enoch understood who he was and that he had a mission to perform.

Saul, who made sport of persecuting Christians, was instantly converted after seeing the Savior and learning that he was a chosen vessel (Acts 9:5; 22: 15). There surely wasn't a Christian breathing who would have described Saul of Tarsus as "chosen"-at least not based on his earthly conduct. He must have been chosen before. And when Saul understood that, he changed his life and his name. The Apostle Paul's conversion was at least partly about coming to understand who he had always been.

As we come to understand the same thing, we will feel a greater sense of mission and more confidence living as a woman of God in a world that doesn't necessarily celebrate women of God. We will cheer each other on rather than compete with each other, because we'll feel secure in our standing before the Lord. And we'll be eager to stand for truth, even when we must stand alone-for every consecrated woman will have times when she must stand alone.

Satan, of course, knows how spiritually potent the knowledge of our divine identity is. He hates women of the noble birthright. He hates us because he is almost out of time, while we are en route to everlasting glory. He hates us because of the influence we have on husbands and children, family and friends, the Church and even the world. It is no secret to him that we are the Lord's secret

weapon.

Thus it should not surprise us that the master of deceit is going all out to keep us from comprehending the majesty of who we are. He offers an array of seductive but sorry substitutes-everything from labels and logos to titles and status-hoping to preoccupy us with the world's artificial identifiers. Not long ago a book listing *The 100 Most Influential Women of All Time* caught my attention. I was interested to find out who the 100 most influential women of all time had been. Here's what you'll find interesting. Eve, the mother of all living-now catch the irony here, the woman without whom we wouldn't even be here-didn't make the list. Come on! This pitiful list demonstrates how absurd the world's view and valuation of women is.

In a prominent magazine, a recent cover story entitled "The Quest for Perfection" promoted a definition of perfection that was disgusting and, frankly, evil. It listed every available lift, tuck, and augmentation, while not so much as mentioning virtue or values, marriage or motherhood-or anything, for that matter, that matters to the Lord.

Clearly, Satan wants us to see ourselves as the world sees us, not as the Lord sees us, because the world's mirror, like a circus mirror in which a 5'10" woman (that's me) appears two feet tall, distorts and minimizes us. Satan tells us we're not good enough. Not smart enough. Not thin enough. Not cute enough. Not clever enough. Not *anything* enough. And that is a big, fat, devilish lie. He wants us to believe that there is no status in being a mother. That is a lie, an evil lie. He wants us to believe that the influence of women is inherently inferior. And that is a lie.

Yet we often buy into Satan's superficialities. After speaking in a general women's meeting on satellite, I received a letter that said this: "Sister Dew, I can relate to you because I can see that you know what it means to have a bad-hair day." Sisters, this was no news flash; I've had *years* of bad-hair days. But though we don't always see beyond our hair and our clothing, the Lord does. For He "seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

Thus Satan's all-out attempt to prevent us from understanding how the Lord sees us, because the more clearly we understand our divine destiny, the more immune we become to Satan. When Satan tried to confuse Moses about his identity, saying, "Moses, son of man, worship me" (Moses 1:12), Moses refused, responding: "I am a son of God" (Moses 1:13). He knew who he was because the Lord had told him, "Thou art my son; . . . and I have a work for thee" (Moses 1:4, 6).

Surely one reason Moses prevailed while the great deceiver ranted and railed was that Moses knew clearly who he was. So it is with us. We will never be happy or feel peace; we will never deal well with life's ambiguities; we will never live up to who we are as women of God until we overcome our mortal identity crisis by understanding who we are, who we have always been, and who we may become.

The Spirit is the key, for as President Joseph F. Smith taught, it is through the power of the Spirit that we may "catch a spark from the awakened memories of the immortal soul, which lights up our whole being as with the glory of our former home." [10](#) It is the Spirit that allows us to pierce the veil and catch glimpses of who we are and who we have always been. Thus our need to be able to hear what the Lord through the Spirit has to say.

Asking in faith, fasting and praying, repenting regularly, forgiving and seeking forgiveness, worshiping in the temple where we may "receive a fulness of the Holy Ghost" (D&C 109: 15), and being obedient-all help us better hear the voice of the Lord in our minds and hearts (see D&C 8:2). Conversely, there are things we cannot do-movies we cannot watch, clothes we cannot wear, gossip we cannot spread, Internet sites we cannot visit, thoughts we cannot entertain, books we cannot

read, and dishonesty we cannot tolerate-if we want the Spirit to be with us.

I can think of nothing more deserving of our energy than learning to better hear the voice of the Spirit. When the Nephite Twelve pleaded with the Father for "that which they most desired," it was the gift of the Holy Ghost (3 Nephi 19:9). Why? Because the Holy Ghost "will show unto [us] all things" (2 Nephi 32:5), including who we are. I know this is true. One day while rocking a niece who was then three months old, I was overwhelmed with an impression about the valor of her spirit. My tears flowed as I rocked and wondered just whom I was rocking. Now that my niece is older, I have told her about that experience, hoping to encourage her onward.

Similarly, when I was that shy farm girl, both my mother and my grandma often told me that there was something chosen about me and my generation. I couldn't quite imagine it, but my spirit wanted me to believe. So I quietly hung on their words and hoped they were true. Is there anything more meaningful a mother or a grandmother or any of us can do for the youth we love than help them begin to see who they *really* are?

As vital as this knowledge is, however, it alone doesn't make mortality fail-safe. President Lee warned that there are many who may "have been among the noble and great" but who "may fail of that calling here in mortality." [11](#) In other words, "many are called, but few are chosen" (D&C 121:40). And, frankly, we do the choosing, because the sobering reality is that whether or not we live up to our premortal promises is entirely up to us.

But the effort required is well worth it, for if we could comprehend how glorious a righteous woman made perfect in the celestial kingdom will be, we would rise up and never be the same again. We would gladly take upon us the name of Jesus Christ (Alma 46:15)-which means following Him, becoming like Him, and dedicating ourselves to Him and His work. Women of God who honor their covenants look differently, dress differently, and act and speak differently from women who have not made the same covenants. Thus women of God who know who they are have unusual and sometimes unexpected influence.

There is a shop in New York City I visit when I am there. Frankly, I don't care for the shop's atmosphere, but because they carry skirts long enough for a tall woman, I endure the experience. On a recent visit, I made plans to meet a friend at this shop, and when I walked through the door, a saleswoman was already waiting for me. "Mizz Dew?" she said with a charming accent. "Yeah?" I responded. "Follow me. Your friend is waiting for you downstairs."

I had never had such a warm reception, but then, for the next hour, my friend and I became acquainted with this delightful European woman. After a while she said, "There is something different about you two. What is it?"

"Do you really want to know?" we asked her. When she nodded yes, I said, "Sit down." For an hour, my friend and I told her what made us different. Since then we've sent materials explaining more. And we've just sent her something else—missionaries who will call on her using our names.

What does knowing who we are and who we have always been have to do with bearing record and testifying of Jesus Christ? It has everything to do with our mandate to take the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. Once we understand who we really are, we are not only beholden to the Lord to help others discover the same truths but we simply cannot be restrained from doing so. If a missionary moment can unfold in a stuffy New York dress shop, it can happen anywhere. And it will happen as the joy of the gospel and the reality of our mission lights our faces and energizes our lives.

I know a woman who responded to a nonmember friend wanting to sell her cosmetics by saying, "You can give me a facial if I can talk about the gospel." Both agreed, and both are here today.

There is no more persuasive missionary messenger than a woman of God who knows who she is and who is thrilled with what she knows. I hasten to add that the most important missionary work we will ever do will be within our families, as their conversion is our highest priority.

Our objective through all of this isn't to build a bigger Church. It is to bless the lives of people—mothers and fathers, sons and daughters—who deserve to know who they are, who they have always been, and who they may become.

Let's not make this harder than it needs to be. We can begin by simply praying for opportunities to serve, for we will do more missionary work through our examples than we ever will pounding a pulpit. Last year the sisters in an Arizona ward provided service, no strings attached, to a nonmember family whose infant son was undergoing open-heart surgery. Those simple acts of kindness launched a remarkable sequence of events, and two weeks ago that family was baptized. I am happy to tell you that the mother of that family is here with us this morning, and she and her husband and their three darling little boys are beginning to find out who they are.

Repeatedly, President Gordon B. Hinckley has pleaded with us to "become a vast army with enthusiasm for this work."<sup>12</sup> In the last general Relief Society meeting, I invited every sister to look for missionary opportunities. And last month at the general Young Women meeting, Sister Margaret Nadauld asked every young woman to reach out to one girl and bring her into full activity this year. Within a week, several of my teenage nieces had already made contacts with nonmember friends. They enlisted immediately in the army.

Can we do any less? If the women and young women of this Church would join together in this glorious work, we would become a vast, enthusiastic part of the Lord's army. None of us can reach everyone, but we can all reach someone—and over time, many someones. The gospel kingdom will not move forward as it must until we as mothers and sisters and favorite aunts become full and eager participants.

Sisters, I am asking you today to respond to our prophet's call to enlist in the Lord's army. And in doing so I make this promise: As soon as we, the sisters of this Church, commit fully to this work, it will explode in an unprecedented way because of our unique, nurturing influence and because of the spirit that attends righteous women. It will flourish because youth who see their mothers and leaders fearlessly sharing the gospel will do likewise.

More than twenty years ago President Kimball prophesied: "The 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."<sup>13</sup> He was talking about us. Imagine the impact if this year every woman with a testimony helped one other woman gain a testimony and begin to find out who she is and was and may become.

I'll take the challenge. Will you join me? Ask the Lord to help you, and He will. Begin by reading Doctrine and Covenants 138 and Abraham 3 about the noble and great ones, and see what the Spirit reveals to you about *you*. When you understand that *you* were chosen and reserved for now, and when you live in harmony with that mission, you'll be happier than you have ever been before.

Listen to these words from President Gordon B. Hinckley: "Woman is God's supreme creation. . . .

"Of all the creations of the Almighty, there is none more . . . inspiring than a . . . daughter of God who walks in virtue with an understanding of why she should do so."<sup>14</sup>

"Rise above the dust of the world. Know that you are daughters of God . . . and that there is for you a great work to be done which cannot be left to others."<sup>15</sup>

My dear sisters, will you seek to remember with the help of the Holy Ghost who you are and who you have always been? Will you remember that you stood by our Savior without flinching? Remember that you were reserved for now because you would have the courage and determination to face the world at its worst and to help rear and lead a chosen generation. Remember the covenants you have made and the power they carry. Remember that you are noble and great and a potential heir of all our Father has. Remember that you are the daughter of a King.

God is our Father, and His Only Begotten Son is the Christ. May we rejoice in once again standing tall for the Savior and serving with valor and vigor in His vineyard. And may we be fearless in building up the Zion of our God-because we know who we are and who we have always been. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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## Notes

[1](#) Office Journal of Lorenzo Snow, 8 October 1900, 181-82, Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

[2](#) Lorenzo Snow, Conference Report, April 1901, 3; emphasis added.

[3](#) George Q. Cannon, *Gospel Truth: Discourses and Writings of President George Q. Cannon*, sel. Jerreld L. Newquist (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 7; emphasis added.

[4](#) Harold B. Lee, "Understanding Who We Are Brings Self-Respect," *Ensign*, January 1974, 5.

[5](#) Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 512.

[6](#) George Q. Cannon, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1852-81), 11:230.

[7](#) *Doctrines of the Restoration: Sermons & Writings of Bruce R. McConkie* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989), 197-98; emphasis added.

[8](#) Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, edited by B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1932-51), 6:364.

[9](#) Spencer W. Kimball, "The Role of Righteous Women," *Ensign*, November 1979, 102.

[10](#) Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine: Sermons and Writings of Joseph F. Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 14.

[11](#) Lee, "Understanding Who We Are," 5.

[12](#) Gordon B. Hinckley, "Find the Lambs, Feed the Sheep," *Ensign*, May 1999, 110.

[13](#) Kimball, "Righteous Women," 104.

[14](#) Gordon B. Hinckley, "Our Responsibility to Our Young Women," *Ensign*, September 1988, 11.

[15](#) Gordon B. Hinckley, "Live Up to Your Inheritance," *Ensign*, November 1983, 84.

