

## *Thou Art an Elect Lady*

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My wife has explained to me that she enjoys learning from other women as they inspire her and give her hope, based on their examples. So I consider this a great honor and privilege to be asked to speak to you today.

Come with me for a few moments on an imaginary journey, back through the centuries of time. Picture yourself a woman, living some time ago, somewhere in the Old World. While conditions would vary according to time and place, you could be reasonably assured that your life would be filled with exceptional hardships and difficulties. Long days of labor for men, women, and children were required to produce enough food to sustain them. There was smoke and mud, cooking over open fires, cold weather, and few comfortable beds. Clothes were washed in streams or tubs, and women labored hard along with men.

Often animals such as cows and goats lived in the home with you to be protected from the cold and thieves. Marriage frequently came at a young age so that children were born before mothers died. Life expectancy might be 30 to 40 years of age. If you survived birth, your mother may not have. For many years, one in three women died in childbirth. Finally, in early America, the death rate was reduced to one in five.

In the 19th century, a woman could not vote and frequently could not inherit property, which was transferred to her eldest son when he turned 21 years of age.

Women were generally not involved in politics or government, nor were they in church leadership positions. Few women received a formal education, and education in an advanced way was rare. The education women received was primarily intended for the education of her children, especially her sons.

There was some question in the 1700s and 1800s whether a woman's physical constitution and mental abilities were innately able to handle the more complex matters of life reserved for men.

Among the reasons for these attitudes about women was an inaccurate understanding of the story of Adam and Eve. Many believed that Eve's decision to partake of the fruit was

unwise and brought upon mankind unnecessary sadness and suffering. Some believed that Eve was inferior and that her daughters should continue to pay for her transgression.

My purpose in recalling scenes from history is not to elicit animosity between genders but to provide a background for the significance of a revelation given to Emma Smith through the Prophet Joseph and to better understand that the doctrine of the restored Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints brought to all of God's children--His sons and daughters--the hope of happiness and joy in this life and eternal life in the world to come.

Now, first of all, we know Eve was an intelligent and noble daughter of God. Adam proclaimed, after both he and Eve had partaken of the fruit, "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" (Moses 5:10).

We also learn of the equal partnership of Adam and Eve as they sought divine direction for themselves and their children. Please pay particular attention to the pronouns *them* and *they* in relation to God's communication with both Adam and Eve as found in the book of Moses:

"And Adam and Eve, his wife, called upon the name of the Lord, and *they* heard the voice of the Lord from the way toward the Garden of Eden, speaking unto *them*, and *they* saw him not. . . .

"And he gave unto *them* commandments, that *they* should worship the Lord their God, and should offer the firstlings of *their* flocks, for an offering unto the Lord" (Moses 5:4-5, emphasis added).

From the beginning, God regarded Adam and Eve as equals--both precious in His sight.

Joseph F. Smith saw in vision the faithful who were awaiting the Savior's Resurrection: "Among the great and mighty ones who were assembled in this vast congregation of the righteous were Father Adam . . . and our glorious Mother Eve, with many of her faithful daughters who had lived through the ages and worshiped the true and living God" (D&C 138:38-39).

Now, with the backdrop of women in the early 1800s, picture in your mind the revelation given to Emma Smith through the Prophet Joseph found in the 25th section of the Doctrine and Covenants. Listen to some of the phrases from that section: "Thou art an elect lady, whom I have called" (v. 3). "Thou shalt receive an inheritance in Zion" (v. 2). "Thou shalt be ordained [or set apart] . . . to expound scriptures, . . . to exhort the church" (v. 7). "Thou shalt receive the Holy Ghost" (v. 8). "Thy time shall be given to writing, and to learning" (v. 8). Emma was directed to make a selection of sacred hymns for the Church and then promised "a crown of righteousness" (v. 15).

It is impossible to comprehend the significance of this revelation, especially in the day it was given. It opened to women in the Church blessings and opportunities not common in that day and time.

Eliza R. Snow enrolled at Oberlin College in Ohio and was in the first class open to women in the United States in 1834. Utah was second only to Wyoming in giving women the right to vote.

In our day, women serve in leadership positions in wards, in stakes, in the community, and do immeasurable good for others. I am well acquainted with the work of the Relief Society general presidency and the contribution they make in the Church and particularly in Welfare Services, where I am employed. These sisters work diligently to the blessing of men and women worldwide.

Recently my family moved into the ward in which Sister Pingree resides. I have learned firsthand that Sister Pingree does not just preach a good sermon; she lives her sermons in a very real way. I have learned that with her, "Charity Never Faileth."

However, you do not have to be a woman in a prominent position to be elect and to bless others. Most will not receive recognition from the world, but they will ever be noble and great in the sight of God and their posterity. Stories of valiant, brave, and admirable women abound. One such woman was Anna Wintch, nicknamed Nettie, who married my wife's great-grandfather.

Nettie walked across the plains to Utah. She was a convert from Switzerland. And as she walked and talked with other young women on that journey, she noticed a young man named Samuel Reber, who had been sent from Utah to accompany the immigrating Saints and help them on their journey to the Salt Lake Valley. Young Samuel was also from Switzerland and frequently rode his horse near these young women. He listened to them converse in their native German language. The girls did not know that this was also his native tongue. He must have enjoyed some interesting moments, until finally he spoke to them in German--much to their surprise and embarrassment.

One of the things he said to Nettie was, "Why don't you come and walk with me? Don't you think I get tired of talking to oxen all the time?" And thus a friendship blossomed into courtship as they traversed the midwestern plains on their way to the Salt Lake Valley.

Before they reached Salt Lake, Samuel proposed marriage to Nettie. However, she did not readily consent. So to persuade her, he told her that he had a plot of land of his own, a home, one horse, and a calf in the southern Utah town of Santa Clara. She made no promise to him, but when they pulled into Salt Lake at their final camp, he gave her an ultimatum. "This outfit leaves for Dixie in the morning at five o'clock. If you would like to go along, be there by that time."

As an old man, when Sammy told the story, he always chuckled as he said, "She was there in time. When I came back from watering the horses, there she was standing by the wheel." He loaded her one box of clothing into the wagon and helped her into the seat. They were married by the bishop in the first town they arrived in and proceeded on towards Santa Clara.

On their way, Nettie kept asking about the lot and the home Sammy owned. Sammy now began to regret his earlier description of the home that he had used to help persuade Nettie to marry him. It wasn't quite what he had described, and when they arrived at night in Santa Clara, Sammy camped in his brother's yard rather than his own.

Before daylight, Sammy slipped out of bed quietly, dressed, and hurried to his place. He wanted to get there first and see how things were--maybe dig up some weeds and arrange

things inside before his beautiful new bride arrived. However, Nettie only pretended to be asleep, and when Sammy left, she also arose from her bed and followed him to the home he had so generously described.

When Nettie arrived, she found Sammy sitting there--"a picture of woe!" The home he described was actually a dugout in a hill. While he had left it as snug and cozy as a dugout could be, it was now a total wreck. The roof was caved in, and the door was dangling on one leather hinge. A summer flood had left it in utter ruin.

What would Nettie do? What would she say? Her words reflect her goodness and her sensitivity to the man she had chosen to love forever. She quietly came up behind him and, viewing the discouraging scene, said to her frightened and beleaguered husband, "Oh, Sammy, don't worry. We can make it just lovely--the nicest place in town!" And so they began their lives together.

The goodness of women and their charity for others is not relegated only to the past days of pioneer ancestors. It flourishes today around the world and among the blessed and generous women of the Church. I observed one such effort in Cape Coast, Ghana, Africa, where a Relief Society president unselfishly sacrificed her time and means to help young women obtain skills that could lead to employment.

Try to imagine this woman, the mother of nine relatively young children, her husband's employment providing a modest income. Even though she was a very busy mother and Relief Society president, she wanted to do something more for others to help them prepare for the future.

This sister had established a three-year training program for approximately 25 young women. She was teaching them hairdressing, cooking, and sewing, which provided homemaking skills and opportunity for gainful employment. The girls attended training five days each week. The Relief Society president organized the training and instructed them with curriculum that would qualify them to receive a certificate or license to obtain work in the community. She furnished most of the materials herself, at the same time raising her nine children. She received no compensation for this work.

When asked how she funded this program, she said that her husband committed 20 percent of his modest income to the project. After tithing, fast offerings, and this contribution, I am uncertain how they survived with such a large family. It is sobering to consider this woman's sacrifice and devotion to serving others. Truly, "Charity Never Faileth."

An author penned these interesting words: "When God wants a great work done in the world or a great wrong righted, he goes about it in a very unusual way. He doesn't stir up his earthquakes or send forth his thunderbolts. Instead, he has a helpless baby born, perhaps in a simple home of some obscure mother. And then God puts the idea into the mother's heart, and she puts it into the baby's mind. And then God waits. The greatest forces in the world are not the earthquakes and the thunderbolts. The greatest forces in the world are [mothers and their] babies".

Isn't it evident that the work of a mother is a great and mighty force? How a mother raises her children will have a greater influence on society than the wars which are fought, the inventions we produce, and all of our modern-day technology.

I am aware that the glowing statements about motherhood may sound inviting, but none of us are so naive as to believe that choosing to be a mother comes without extraordinary commitment, unbelievable effort, and, too often, precious little recognition. Let me read a brief excerpt from the journal of a young woman who recorded her experience of going to church one Sunday.

Now, picture this mother with seven young children--the youngest a set of twins 11 and a half months old--and her husband serving as a bishop. She tells of bathing everyone, finding their clothing, combing their hair, and trying to find that eternally lost shoe. Finally, she prepares the diaper bag and bottles and slips out of the door for church.

After having bathed the children and dressed them in clean Sunday clothing, she didn't realize at first that some of the children had gone into the yard to play and had not kept themselves entirely clean. Now from her journal:

"Church is only one block away. We get out and I look at Misty's dress. It has chocolate or dirt on it. Too much to pretend I don't notice. So I tell her to walk home fast and I will let Brandon go into Junior Sunday School himself. When I get to the chapel doors, I look back and Amber is still outside walking slowly. I yell sweetly to her, but she won't hurry, and I'm thinking, why do they have to turn one and a half? Finally I close the door after watching her shake her head at me, peeking through a crack to see if that will persuade her to come.

"She runs to the door. I open it and she comes in. I can't take her hand because the strap on the diaper bag is broken and it is in one arm and one of the babies in the other. I stop to pick up the announcement. The greeter says, 'Hello, how are you today?' I smile, hesitate a moment, and say, 'Just fine.'

"We sit down and I look at Troy. Sometime and somewhere he manages to get wet and dirty knees on his good Sunday clothes. Very dirty. I know I can't sit with him for one and a half hours and feel like explaining why he's so dirty. So I tell Jan to give Tawny a bottle if she needs it and to watch Amber, and I take Troy home to change.

"I drive home and there in the house is Misty and Brandon. 'He wouldn't go to Junior Sunday School alone,' said Misty. I change Troy, help Misty change her dress, and drive back to church. We are singing the sacrament song. Troy sees Tawny's bottle--I hurry and give him his but it's leaked into the diaper bag onto his only dry diaper. His bottle only has three ounces left, but it's sacrament time. He grabs for the bread and gets several pieces. And when the water comes, he is calmly drinking his bottle, but he swiftly stretches out his arm and hits the tray and knocks about one-half of the water out of each cup. Guess where all of the water goes? On Amber! She starts to cry. I am holding both babies. I don't even have a hand for the sacrament. I finally take it. Jan grabs Troy back, and I comfort Amber and smooth out her wet dress.

"After opening exercises, I wait until everyone leaves the chapel, and I stand up holding both babies, who weigh 39 pounds. Everyone is out of the chapel but the president of the stake Sunday School. He sees my plight and carries the diaper bag and walks to class with us. There are two chairs in the back of class, and I

head for them. I put Troy and Tawny down with some toys and actually sit peacefully for five minutes. Then Tawny soils her diaper and in walks my husband, the bishop. He brings his own chair, sits by me, and says, 'What smells?'

The story goes downhill from there!

At the time, this young mother wondered if it was all worth it. She went faithfully to church, every week, eventually caring for even more children while her husband continued to serve in time-consuming and demanding Church positions. Was it really worth it? What good came out of going to church week after week, and month after month, and year after year?

The answer to that question came a few years later in a letter from her oldest daughter telling about her experience one Sunday. She said:

"Mom, I wanted to write and tell you of an experience that my husband and I had regarding our stake conference."

This young woman had three children of her own and was expecting a fourth.

"We all got ready for stake conference, and as we finally piled into the van, we realized that we would be 10 or more minutes late and would be sitting on the hard chairs back in the cultural hall.

"Before my husband could back out of the garage, I looked at him and said, 'Let's not go today. We can stay home. No one will miss us.' My husband agreed, and everyone jumped out of the van and headed for the door. I was the last one out of the van, carrying baby bags and other paraphernalia. As I reached the kitchen door, an unexpected picture came into my mind.

"What I saw was you. I saw you there in church with all 10 of us children. I remembered that you were there every week, without fail. I realize now that you couldn't have enjoyed Sundays all the time but that you went anyway--as hard as it must have been. The thought came to my mind, 'My mother did it, and if she could do it, then I should too.'

"I went into our home and said to my husband, 'We have to go!' He looked at me and he must have wondered what was going on in my mind. 'We have to go,' I said. 'My mother did it for me, and I have to do it for my children.' "

There are many ways to contribute to the world, society, and our fellowmen. Being an honorable mother is not the least of them. Life will bring to each of us joy and happiness. It will also, at some time, leave us breathless and wondering. Sometimes we will worry, and sometimes we will weep, but through it all, as we are faithful, it will be worth it. Thank you for being God's noble daughters. And thank you for making the world a better place and for being the nurturers, the ones who bring softness, kindness, and reason to a troubled world.

I wonder sometimes about the good women who have raised their children, spoiled their grandchildren, and worn themselves out with unselfish service and now find themselves

in the later years of life. Perhaps they wonder if they are of value anymore. They have earned their fair share of gray hair, and they may walk a little slower. Perhaps they live alone. Their callings in the Church don't seem as important, and not so many people ask their advice anymore. If any of you find yourself in or nearing this situation, let me assure you that every good woman continues to teach valuable lessons to her family and others--throughout her entire life.

Let me tell you about my own mother, who passed away a few years ago at the age of 86. After living a full and active life, there came the time, the last few months of her life, when she was unable to care for herself. She lived with my sister and had the kindest of care. Then her physician announced that nothing else could be done to preserve her life and that it would only be a short while until her time would come.

I remembered wondering what a person might think, realizing that it was their time to go. I learned something from my mother, who lived with great faith! She taught us lessons that will never be forgotten. She called her bishop, paid tithing and fast offerings well past her death, renewed her temple recommend, and made certain the bishop approved of her funeral services. She then assigned her children specific responsibilities to do with her funeral and estate and expected a report back before her passing.

Her remaining time was spent with a steady stream of visitors--friends and family who had been touched in some way by her life. The words we heard from her most often were "I love you" and "thank you." "Thank you for being such a good friend." "Thank you for being a good son or daughter." When she quietly slept in this life for the final time, grateful children knelt around her bed and expressed appreciation for a mother whose love, faith, and devotion taught important lessons until the very end. Good women never stop teaching others.

Earlier we read from the book of Moses God's words to both Adam and Eve, beginning their journey together as equals. Listen now as we hear the voice of God across the centuries of time, providing us with just a tiny glimpse of the sacred promises that await His faithful sons and daughters who leave this mortal existence. Pay attention again to the pronouns *they* and *them*, referring to both men and women.

"If a man marry a wife . . . and . . . abide in my covenant, . . . *they* shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to *their* exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon *their* heads. . . .

"Then shall *they* be gods, because *they* have no end; therefore shall *they* be from everlasting to everlasting, because *they* continue; then shall *they* be above all, because all things are subject unto *them*. Then shall *they* be gods, because *they* have all power, and the angels are subject unto *them*" (D&C 132:19-20, emphasis added).

I am sure that when Joseph authorized the temple endowment in the Nauvoo Temple, women did not expect to participate, but as they were given sacred covenants and promises equal to men, they began to recognize their true nobility and calling as daughters of God. I know that men alone, the priesthood alone, cannot build the kingdom of God without elect women. I am grateful the key of knowledge has been restored so that we, together, men and women, understand our lives here and in the eternities are a partnership--"then shall they be gods, because they have all power."

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.