

"Bright as the Sun, This Heavenly Ray Lights Ev'ry Land Today"

Harriet Uchtdorf

This address was given Friday, April 29, 2005, at the BYU Women's Conference

© 2005 by Brigham Young University Women's Conference. All rights reserved

For further information write:
BYU Women's Conference
352 Harman Continuing Education Building
Provo, Utah 84602
801-422-7692
E-mail: womens_conference@byu.edu
Home page: <http://womensconference.byu.edu>

My dear sisters, I love to attend the BYU Women's Conference. During *last* year's conference, I made plans to attend every session *this* year. I wanted to relax and listen and be uplifted. It never was part of my plan to be a presenter. But in the Church we learn to be flexible and learn to adjust *our plans*, right?

During general conference last October, I even had to learn not to make any more detailed plans for the rest of my life. In 1999 my husband and I were transferred from Europe to Church headquarters in Salt Lake City. I used to call our assignment in Salt Lake City our "overseas assignment," because I was expecting soon to go back to our homeland, Germany, back to our children and grandchildren, back to our longtime friends, back to our familiar environment, and back to our home, which we still kept.

In my mind's eye, I could see Heavenly Father smile down at me as I was making detailed plans for our future, not considering *His* timetable and *His* plans for us.

Last October, on the Friday before general conference at about noon, my husband surprised me with a visit at home. He normally doesn't come home for lunch, but he called and said that he could be with me in a few minutes. I quickly prepared a light lunch. When my husband entered our house and he looked into my eyes, he did not say one word, but I could feel in my heart and in my mind that he had been called to the holy apostleship. At this moment, the Spirit bore a strong testimony to me that this was the will of the Lord, and that our life would be changed forever. We spent a very special hour together in our home, sharing our innermost feelings, which included also moments of sacred turmoil. These were tender moments we enjoyed at our wonderful place of refuge and of defense. When he left for his office again, I knew with all my soul that he was truly called to be an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Only a few days before, we were on our daily walk in our neighborhood and shared our thoughts that two new Apostles would be called during the upcoming general conference. We were curious who they might be. In our evening prayers, we asked Heavenly Father to bless and protect these new Apostles and their families and help them in this great transition. Little did we know or even guess who we were praying for. But I know of the

power of prayer, and I know that your prayers have blessed us since this change came into our lives.

Alone at home I reflected on my life, our plans, the Lord's plan, and His timetable. My thoughts went back to when I was 12 years old. It was a sad time in my young life. My father had passed away from cancer. He was a great father, a loving husband, just a good man. He was very educated, spoke five languages, played professionally four different musical instruments in a symphony orchestra, and came from a prominent family of Frankfurt.

My parents had great plans for us. The future had looked bright and promising, even after many destructive years of war. But these two years--terrible years--of my father's illness turned our home into a place of suffering and sadness. After my father's death, my mother was extremely depressed. We went every Sunday to our Protestant church service, but there was no balm of Gilead. There was nothing and nobody who could comfort my mother.

Well, not quite! Our Heavenly Father, in His great love, had not forgotten us.

Eight months after the passing of my father, two American missionaries knocked on our door in Frankfurt, Germany. Those two missionaries, guided by the Spirit and well prepared, knew exactly what our little single-mother family needed. After a short and pleasant conversation, they handed my mother the Book of Mormon, with some marked verses to be read before their return in a few days. My mother loved to read the Bible, and she was immediately interested in this new book, curious about its content. When she started to read the Book of Mormon, she could not stop until she had read the whole book. She was so excited about the message that often my sister and I had to sit down and listen as she read to us some verses which impressed her so much that she felt they were written just for her.

Those two inspired missionaries came back after a few days and taught us the plan of salvation. It was like a miracle. Our eyes and hearts were opened to an, until then, unknown vision of our earthly existence. We learned about the purpose of life, where we came from, why we are here, and where we will go after this life. We learned who we were truly--that we truly were children of our Heavenly Father--and that He loved us and cared for us. They taught us that families could be together forever, even beyond this life.

When these two young men, serving the Lord far away from their own families, testified with power and conviction of this glorious truth, memories came back to me of the last weeks of my father's life and his suffering. I had stood and prayed often at the window of our apartment, looking out to see when the doctor would come to bring relief for my father's pain. How I loved these two young missionaries, well prepared by the Lord and by their parents, teachers, and friends, teaching us the principles of eternal families. On this day, there was no darkness in our home, because light and darkness cannot occupy the same space at the same time. We felt the Spirit, we knew the message was true, and on this day tears flowed freely and hope came back to our home. This was a true miracle for our family; it was as if angels had been sent to us. Those two missionaries were the angels of glory who brought us the restored gospel.

There is a beautiful hymn we just heard [at the conference] of the Restoration which

reflects very much how we felt at this time. In some ways, we considered it our "German hymn." We sang it whenever possible, and every time it touched our hearts deeply. It is a powerful, uplifting, and joyful hymn. I quote:

"Hark, all ye nations! Hear heaven's voice
Thru ev'ry land that all may rejoice!
Angels of glory shout the refrain:
Truth is restored again!
Oh, how glorious from the throne above
Shines the gospel light of truth and love!
Bright as the sun, this heavenly ray
Lights ev'ry land today"
(*Hymns*, no. 264).

The missionaries invited us to attend church on Sunday. We were a little late and had to squeeze into a filled chapel when the opening hymn was sung. It was exactly this beloved hymn of the Restoration. The members were singing with great enthusiasm and joy. I felt like I was sitting among an angels' choir. I had never heard any of our Protestant congregations sing with such power and volume.

Today I know this was the first time in my 12-year-old life that I felt the Spirit of God testifying of the truth of the Restoration. I felt as if I were being wrapped up in a warm and secure blanket of divine love.

The members of the Church welcomed us warmly; they were true friends. We felt immediately part of the family of Saints. We loved to go to church, and we felt at home!

Finally, on a cold winter day, my mother, my nine-year-old sister, and I were baptized, and we stepped through this marvelous gate on our journey from darkness into the light toward eternal life. And we rejoiced, as verse two of this great hymn proclaims:

"Searching in darkness, nations have wept;
Watching for dawn, their vigil they've kept.
All now rejoice; the long night is o'er.
Truth is on earth once more!"

We loved our new life. My sister and I couldn't believe how my mother was changing. She smiled again. We talked together; we prayed together; we laughed together. There was that spark back in her eyes, a desire to learn. There was new hope and a joyful heart and face.

My mother radiated what Alma referred to in the precious Book of Mormon when he asked the people of the Church: "Have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances?" (Alma 5:14).

Yes, she had become a new person!

Such a life-changing decision was not unnoticed by our extended family. My grandmother felt that we had become unfaithful to the faith of our fathers. My Aunt Lisa thought we were out of our minds. She announced that she would search out the

missionaries in her town and convince them of their wrong ways. She found the meetinghouse; she found the missionaries; she talked to them; and she got baptized. It was much more difficult for my grandmother to make this important but huge change in her life. It took many years of *watching us* and *observing* how the gospel and the Church influenced our lives before she had a firm testimony of her own and became a member. Now we are all sealed together forever.

As the blessing of the restored gospel came to our country, it is now spreading throughout the world. Last month my husband and I were on an assignment in Chile and Peru. As we met with the wonderful members and missionaries, the hymn "Hark, All Ye Nations!" was sung in the beautiful Spanish language. Members of various cultural and ethnic backgrounds bore their witness of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. It touched my heart when a newly baptized, humble brother bore a sincere testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith in a remote chapel in Peru.

"Oh, how glorious from the throne above
Shines the gospel light of truth and love!
Bright as the sun, this heavenly ray
Lights ev'ry land today."

How grateful I am for the many wonderful missionaries who are serving in all the world today. They are bringing heavenly light into a dark world. As our hymn proclaims:

"Chosen by God to serve him below,
To ev'ry land and people we'll go,
Standing for truth with fervent accord,
Teaching his holy word."

My dear sisters, you are the women who will prepare these young men and women to serve missions. You will help them to bring the gospel light to every land today. You will serve a mission with your husband or as a mature single sister and bless the people of the world. You will be an example to our youth--an example in decency and quality in everything that affects our lives. You will teach our youth to pray and to study. You will teach them to be confident and have faith in Jesus Christ. You will teach them leadership and humility, and you will help them to claim the gift of discernment through their own righteousness. You will teach them that the truth will not always be popular but that it will always be right. And after all of this, you can promise them:

"That which is of God is light; and he that receives light, and continues in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day" (D&C 50:24).

My dear sisters, thank you for being such a wonderful influence for good! I love you! May God bless you! I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.