

"Here Am I, Send Me"

Elder M. Russell Ballard

member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; husband, father, grandfather.

© 2001 Elder M. Russell Ballard. All rights reserved.

Sisters, I am delighted to be invited to be with you today. It is an honor for me to be with you. I bring you the greetings of The First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. I was with them this morning in the temple, and they send to you their love. I hope I can represent our family as well as my wife, Barbara, did earlier this afternoon. Recently I spoke at a Brigham Young University devotional about the important role of women in the Church. I have been asked by the Women's Conference committee to share with you this afternoon some of the same things that I told the students.

Sister Ballard and I have been married for fifty years this August. The most important day in my life was the day we were married in the Salt Lake Temple. We are the parents of two sons and five daughters, some of whom are here this afternoon. We now have forty-one grandchildren, of whom twenty-two are granddaughters, and some of them are here today. Now, with this many women around me all of the time, I count myself as an expert on the subject of women.

I received an outline called "A Woman's Lifeline" the other day that I can relate to because I've seen all these little girls grow up, and I thought you might be able to relate to it also.

"Age 3: She looks at herself and sees a queen.

"Age 8: She looks at herself and sees Cinderella.

"Age 15: She looks at herself and sees an ugly duckling (Mom I can't go to school looking like this today!)

"Age 20: She looks at herself and sees "too fat/too thin, too short/too tall, too straight/too curly" but decides she's going out anyway.

"Age 30: She looks at herself and sees "too fat/too thin, too short/too tall, too straight/too curly" but decides she doesn't have time to fix it so she's going out anyway.

"Age 40: She looks at herself and sees "too fat/too thin, too short/too tall, too straight/too curly" but says, "At least I am clean," and goes out anyway.

"Age 50: She looks at herself and sees "I am what I am" and goes wherever she wants to go.

"Age 60: She looks at herself and reminds herself of all the people who can't even see themselves in the mirror anymore. Goes out and conquers the world.

"Age 70: She looks at herself and sees wisdom, laughter, and ability and goes out and enjoys life.

"Age 80: Doesn't bother to look. Just puts on a purple hat and goes out to have fun with the world.

"The moral is, maybe we should all grab that purple hat a little earlier."

Sometimes you sisters may feel like the Brethren do not appreciate the important contribution you make to your families and to the work of the Lord. Perhaps if they experienced what someone thinks should be the planned activity for the next "Survivor" show, it would make a difference:

The plan is that "six men will be dropped on an island with one van and four children, and they'll be on the island for six weeks. Each child plays two sports and either takes music or dance lessons. There is no access to fast food.

"Each man must take care of his four children, keep his assigned house clean, correct all homework, complete science projects, cook, do laundry, etc.

"The men only have access to television when the children are asleep and all chores are done; there is only one TV between them, and there is no remote.

"The men must put on makeup daily, applying it themselves either while driving or while making four lunches. They must attend weekly PTA meetings; clean up after their sick children at 3:00 a.m.; make an Indian hut model with six toothpicks, a tortilla, and one marker; and get a four-year-old to eat a serving of peas.

"The children vote them off the island based on performance. The winner is the first one off who gets to go back to his work."

The reason I am concerned about you dear women of the Church, knowing how important you are to the Lord, is expressed in a letter that came to the Church offices a short time ago. A good sister wrote:

"I have a wonderful husband and children, whom I love deeply. I love the Lord and His Church more than I can say. I know the Church is true! I realize I shouldn't feel discouraged about who I am. Yet I have been going through an identity crisis most of my life. I have never dared utter these feelings out loud but have hidden them behind the huge, confident smile I wear to Church every week.

"For years I have doubted if I had any value beyond my roles as a wife and mother. I have feared that men are that they might have joy but women are that they might be overlooked. I long to feel that I as a woman matter to the Lord."¹

If you have ever wondered, "Does the Lord respect women? Do women matter to the Lord? Do women matter to the leaders of the Church?" The answer is a resounding YES!

Elder James E. Talmage stated that "the world's greatest champion of woman and womanhood is Jesus the Christ."² I believe that is a true statement. The first time the Lord acknowledged Himself to be the Christ was to a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. He taught her about living water and proclaimed, "I . . . am he" (John 4:26). And it was Martha to whom He proclaimed, "I am the resurrection, and the life. . . . And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:25-26).

And then, during His greatest agony as He hung on the cross, the Savior reached out to one person, His mother. In that terrible but glorious moment he asked John the Beloved to care for her as though she were his own (John 19:26-27).

Of this you may be certain: The Lord especially loves righteous women—women who are not only

faithful but filled with faith, women who are optimistic and cheerful because they know who they are and where they are going, women who are striving to live and serve as women of God.

There are those who suggest that males are favored of the Lord because they are ordained to hold the priesthood. Anyone who believes that does not understand the great plan of happiness. The premortal and mortal natures of men and women were specified by the Lord Jehovah Himself, and it is simply not within His character to diminish the roles and responsibilities of any of His children.

As President Joseph Fielding Smith explained, "The Lord offers to his daughters every spiritual gift and blessing that can be obtained by his sons."³ We also know that all of us, men and women alike, receive the gift of the Holy Ghost and are entitled to personal revelation. We may all take upon us the Lord's name, become the sons and daughters of Christ, partake of the ordinances of the temple from which we emerge endowed with power, receive the fulness of the gospel, and achieve exaltation in the celestial kingdom. These spiritual blessings are available to men and women alike, according to their faithfulness and their efforts to receive them.

The basic doctrinal purpose for the creation of the earth is to provide for God's spirit children the continuation of the process of exaltation and eternal life. God said to Moses, "And I, God, created man in mine own image, in the image of mine Only Begotten created I him; male and female created I them. And I, God, blessed them, and said unto them: Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Moses 2:27-28).

The Proclamation on the Family confirms that God has not revoked nor changed this commandment. The First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles "solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children."⁴

This doctrine sometimes causes women to ask: "Is a woman's value dependent exclusively upon her role as a wife and mother?" The answer is simple and obvious—no!

Although there is nothing a woman can do that has more far-reaching, eternal effect than to rear her children to walk in righteousness, motherhood and marital status are not the only measures of a woman's worth. Some women do not have the privilege of marrying or rearing children in this life. To the worthy, these blessings will come later. Women who do have the privilege of rearing children will, of course, be held accountable for that priceless, eternal stewardship. Although there is simply not a more significant contribution you can make to society, to the Church, or to the eternal destiny of our Father's children than what you do as a mother, motherhood is not the only measure of goodness or of one's acceptance before the Lord. Every righteous woman has a significant role to play in the onward march of the kingdom of God.

I have a deep and abiding feeling about women and about the crucial role they make in every important setting, particularly in the family and in the Church. I have spoken boldly about the role women must play in the councils of the Church. We cannot fulfill our mission as a Church without the inspired insight and support of women.

For that reason I am concerned about what I see happening with some of our young women and some of our not-so-young women. The adversary is having a heyday distorting attitudes about gender and roles and families and individual worth. He is the author of mass confusion about values and roles, the contribution and the unique nature of women. Today's popular culture, which is preached by every form of media from the silver screen to the Internet, celebrates the sexy, saucy, socially aggressive woman. These distortions are seeping into the thinking of some of our own women in the Church.

My deep desire this afternoon is to clarify how we in the presiding councils of the Church feel about

the sisters of this Church, how our Heavenly Father feels about His daughters and what He expects of them. My dear sisters, we believe in you.

We believe in and are counting on your goodness and your strength, your propensity for virtue and valor, your kindness and courage, your strength and resilience. We believe in your mission as women of God. We realize that you are the emotional (and sometimes spiritual) glue that holds families and often ward families together. We believe that the Church simply will not accomplish what it must without your faith and faithfulness, your innate tendency to put the well-being of others ahead of your own, and your spiritual strength and tenacity.

Women live in homes under many different circumstances—married, single, widowed, divorced, with children and without. But where the women are righteous and good, love, peace, and joy abound in the home. When children are in the home, every effort should be made by mothers to be home for them. All righteous women are part of God's great plan for His daughters to become queens and to receive the highest blessings in time or eternity.

On the other hand, Satan's plan is to get you so preoccupied with the world's glitzy lie about women that you completely miss what you have come here to do and to become. Remember, he wants us to "be miserable like unto himself " (2 Nephi 2:27). Never lose your precious identity by doing anything that would jeopardize the promised eternal future your Heavenly Father has provided for you.

Women have labored valiantly in the cause of truth and righteousness from before the foundations of the world. In President Joseph F. Smith's vision of the redemption of the dead, he saw not only Father Adam and other prophets but "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 138:39).

Think about the incomparable role of Eve, whose actions set in motion the great plan of our Father, and about Mary, the "precious and chosen vessel" (Alma 7:10), who bore the Christ Child. Surely no one would question the contribution made by these majestic women.

Our dispensation is not without its heroines. Countless women from every continent and walk of life have made dramatic contributions to the cause of Christ. Consider Lucy Mack Smith, the mother of the martyred Prophet Joseph and Hyrum and the grandmother of President Joseph F. Smith. Her resilience and righteousness under the most emotionally and spiritually taxing conditions surely influenced her prophet sons and set them firmly on the path towards fulfilling their foreordained destiny.

At this point you may be thinking, "But what about me and my contribution? I'm not Eve or Mary or even Lucy Mack Smith. I'm just regular, plain old me. Is there something about my contribution that is significant to the Lord? Does He really need me?" Remember, the righteous who are not highly visible are valued, too, and in the words of a Book of Mormon prophet, are "no less serviceable unto the people" (Alma 48:19).

President Spencer W. Kimball responded to that question this way: "Both a righteous man and a righteous woman are a blessing to all those whom their lives touch.

". . . [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, . . . [we] are accountable for those things which long ago were expected of us."[5](#)

Every sister in this Church who has made covenants with the Lord has a divine mandate to help save souls, to lead the women of the world, to strengthen the homes of Zion, and to build the

kingdom of God. Sister Eliza R. Snow, the second general president of the Relief Society, said: "Every sister in this church should be a preacher of righteousness . . . because we have greater and higher privileges than any other females upon the face of the earth." [6](#)

Every sister who stands for truth and righteousness diminishes the influence of evil. Dear sisters, every one of you who strengthens and protects your family is doing the work of God. Every sister who lives as a woman of God becomes a beacon for others to follow and plants seeds of righteous influence that will be harvested for decades to come. Every sister who makes and keeps sacred covenants becomes an instrument in the hands of God.

I have been drawn to an interchange between God the Father and His Eldest and Only Begotten Son, who is the ultimate example of living up to one's premortal promises. When God asked who would come to earth to prepare a way for all mankind to be saved and strengthened and blessed, it was Jesus Christ who said, simply, "Here am I, send me" (Abraham 3:27).

Just as the Savior stepped forward to fulfill His divine responsibilities, we have the challenge and responsibility to do likewise. If you are wondering if you make a difference to the Lord, imagine the effect when you make such commitments as the following:

"Father, if you need a woman to rear children in righteousness, Here am I, send me."

"If you need a woman to make a house, a home filled with love, Here am I, send me."

"If you need a woman who will shun vulgarity and dress modestly and speak with dignity and show the world how joyous it is to keep the commandments, Here am I, send me."

"If you need a woman who can resist the alluring temptations of the world by keeping her eyes fixed on eternity, Here am I, send me."

Between now and the day the Lord comes again, He needs women in every family, in every ward, in every community, in every nation who will step forward in righteousness and say by their words and their actions, "Here am I, send me."

My question today is, Will you be one of those women?

Now I know you want to. But how will you do it? How, in a world filled with deceptive messages about women and the family and knowing the significance of both to the Lord, will you perpetually respond to the Lord by saying, "Here am I, send me"?

For those who really want to live up to who you are, for those who at all costs want to repent, if necessary, and who want to see through Satan's deceptions, may I suggest that you listen to and follow those whom you sustain as prophets, seers, and revelators. I suggest that you learn to hear the voice of the Spirit, or the voice of the Lord as communicated by the power of the Holy Ghost.

I cannot stress enough the importance of listening to and following the prophet and the apostles. In today's world, where twenty-four hours a day the media's talking heads spew forth conflicting opinions, where men and women jockey for everything from your money to your vote, there is one unpolluted, unbiased, clear voice that you can always count on. And that is the voice of the living prophet and the apostles. Our only motive is "the everlasting welfare of your souls" (2 Nephi 2:30).

Think of it! Think about the value of having a source of information you can always count on, that will always have your eternal interests at heart, and that will always provide inspired truth. That's a

phenomenal gift and guide.

Today I make you the same promise I made last month in general conference. It is a simple one, but it is true. If you will listen to the living prophet and the apostles and heed our counsel, you will not go astray.

If you want to avoid the snares of Satan, if you need direction when the choices in front of you are puzzling and perplexing, learn to hear the voice of the Lord as communicated through the Holy Ghost. And then, of course, do what it tells you to do.

Nephi taught clearly that the Holy Ghost is the "gift of God unto all those who diligently seek him" and that "he that diligently seeketh shall find" (1 Nephi 10: 17, 19). The unquestionable reality, my dear sisters, is that you control how close you are to the Lord. You determine just how clear and readily available promptings from the Holy Ghost will be. You determine this by your actions, by your attitude, by the choices you make, by the things you watch and wear and listen to and read, and by how consistently and sincerely you invite the Spirit into your life.

As life progresses, how will you respond to challenges that will inevitably come? Will you know where to turn for peace and consolation if your marriage faces hard times or health challenges loom up or you are called upon to bury a child—as two of our own children have done—or if a child threatens to stray from the gospel path? How will you know what to do when you face financial reverses? Where will you turn for insight and inspiration when you are called upon to lead in your ward or stake? You dear mothers, where will you turn for strength to care for and lead your family on Sundays when your husbands are serving as priesthood leaders in your stake or ward?

My dear sisters, there is only one way to safely and confidently meet the obstacles and opportunities that are part of life's path: listen to the prophet and the apostles, study the principles we teach, and then take those principles to the Lord and ask Him how you should apply them in your life. Ask Him to influence your thoughts, temper your actions, and guide your steps. "Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good" (Alma 37:37). He will communicate with you through the power and the presence of the Holy Ghost.

There are several things you can do to greatly enhance your ability to understand the promptings of the Holy Ghost and thereby hear and respond to the voice of God. Let me tell you what they are.

First is fasting and prayer. When the sons of Mosiah were united with Alma the Younger, they rejoiced in their reunion and acknowledged that because they had "given themselves to much prayer and fasting" they had been given the spirit of prophecy and revelation, and when "they taught, they taught with power and authority of God" (Alma 17: 3).

Second is immersing yourself in the scriptures. The word of God will "tell you all things what ye should do" (2 Nephi 32:3). The scriptures are a conduit for personal revelation. I urge you to intensify your study of them. I promise that your ability to hear the voice of the Lord as communicated through the Holy Ghost will increase and improve.

Third is preparing to spend time in the house of the Lord. When the appropriate time comes for you to go to the temple, you will leave the temple "armed with . . . power" (D&C 109:22) and with the promise that as we "grow up" in our knowledge of the Lord we will "receive a fulness of the Holy Ghost" (D&C 109:15). The temple is a place of personal revelation. If you are endowed, visit the temple regularly. If you are not, prepare yourselves to enter. Inside the doors of the temple rests the power that will fortify you against the vicissitudes of life.

Fourth is listening to the counsel of your parents and your husband. They are usually wise and

experienced. Share with them your fears and concerns. Seek blessings from your father or your husband. If he has gone to the other side of the veil, or if for some reason he is not worthy or able, go to your bishop or your stake president. They love you and will count it a privilege to bless your life. If you haven't yet done so, you should also receive your patriarchal blessing.

Fifth is obedience and repentance. There are certain things you simply cannot do if you want to have the Holy Ghost with you. It is not possible to listen to inappropriate music, watch movies or soap operas filled with sexual innuendo, tamper with pornography on the Internet (or anywhere else for that matter), take the name of the Lord in vain, wear revealing clothing, or compromise in any way the law of chastity. Mothers, you particularly must set the example of modesty in dress and action. You cannot disregard the values of true womanhood and expect the Holy Ghost to remain with you. Whenever anyone participates in those kinds of activities, it should not be a surprise that feelings of loneliness, discouragement, and unworthiness follow. Do not make the choice to go it alone rather than have the Spirit of the Lord to guide, to protect, to prompt, to warn, and to fill you with peace. Repent if you need to so you can enjoy the companionship of the Spirit.

Women and men who can hear the voice of the Lord and who respond to those promptings become invaluable instruments in His hands.

Now finally, my dear sisters, you have such a profound, innate spiritual ability to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, you need never wonder again if you have worth in the sight of the Lord and to the Brethren in the presiding councils of the Church. We love you. We cherish you. We respect you. Never doubt that your influence is absolutely vital to preserving the family and to assisting with the growth and spiritual vitality of the Church. This Church will not reach its foreordained destiny without you. We men simply cannot nurture as you nurture. Most of us don't have the sensitivity, spiritual and otherwise, that by your eternal nature you inherently have. Your influence on families and with children, youth, and men is singular. You are natural-born nurturers. Because of these unusual gifts and talents, you are vital to taking the gospel to all the world, to demonstrating that there is joy in living the way prophets have counseled us to live. I see many grandmothers here today, and I encourage you to never, never stop teaching, and never allow your wisdom of a lifetime of faithful dedication to the Lord to grow dim in your own families or your wards.

Today more than ever, we need women of faith, virtue, vision, and charity, as the Relief Society Declaration proclaims. We need women who can hear and will respond to the voice of the Lord, women who at all costs will defend and protect the family. We don't need women who want to be like men, sound like men, dress like men, drive like some men, or act like men. We do need women who rejoice in their womanhood and have a spiritual confirmation of their identity, their value, and their eternal destiny. Above all, we need women who will stand up for truth and righteousness and decry evil at every turn, women who will simply say, "Here am I, Lord, send me."

I bear my witness and testimony to you that each one of you is precious to the Lord and to His Church. Never doubt that this kingdom of God will continue to roll forward until it fills the entire earth. For the Church to accomplish its mission, we need every sister, young and old, to be beacons and banners to the entire world, to show the rest of the world there is a people who honor and uphold the role of women as daughters of God destined to receive every eternal blessing He has for His faithful children.

I testify to you, my dear sisters, that I know that Jesus is the Christ, that He lives, and that this is His Church. I plead with our Heavenly Father that He will bless you precious women of the Church in every way, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

[1](#) Letter in possession of author.

[2](#) James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 3d ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1916), 475.

[3](#) Joseph Fielding Smith, "Magnifying Our Callings in the Priesthood," *Improvement Era*, June 1970, 66.

[4](#) First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles, "The Family, A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, November 1995, 102.

[5](#) Spencer W. Kimball, *My Beloved Sisters* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 37.

[6](#) Eliza R. Snow, "Great Indignation Meeting," *Deseret Evening News*, 14 January 1870, 2

