

Learning to Be Articulate As Well As Righteous

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If we as Latter-day Saint women of God are to let our light shine as a standard, we need to be articulate as well as righteous. How can we learn to express our beliefs and standards to the world? How can we be effective without being overbearing?

On the morning of April 6, 2000, I, along with many of you, went to my stake center to participate in the dedication of the Palmyra Temple. The morning light was just dawning. It was a Thursday, and yet people were coming from all directions dressed in their Sunday best. I was struck by the thought that there were thousands of Saints on that very morning doing just what I was doing. They were gathering together in a spirit of unity and excitement to be a part of this historic occasion. From there they would scatter to their workplaces or to their homes and schools. But for this moment we would pause together and drink in the Spirit that prevailed.

It was one of those electric moments. I left that morning filled with the kind of excitement that often grips me. This is a great Church, and I am part of it! If I had antennas that could flash neon lights, I would look like a walking billboard. I would stop traffic. I would shout for joy.

I hope that joy will find expression today as we recognize the light within us and speak of expressing our beliefs and standards to the world.

Mary Ellen Smoot, general Relief Society president, has said: “Consider with me, for a moment, what it means to walk in the light of the Lord. First of all, we’ll have light—light in our countenances, light in our outlook, light even when darkness surrounds us. And it also means we will walk with purpose and direction.”¹

I feel the light that emanates from you today, and I count it a great blessing to be numbered among you as your sister. I *love* being a Latter-day Saint woman. I love knowing that I am a spirit daughter of God and that my life has meaning, purpose, and direction. So great is my urge at times to share the good news, I feel like Alma when he said, “O that I were an angel, and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with

the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people! Yea," he said, "I would declare unto every soul, as with the voice of thunder, repentance and the plan of redemption, that they should repent and come unto our God, that there might not be more sorrow upon all the face of the earth" (Alma 29:1–2).

I, too, have wished that I could tell those around me in a way that they could hear, that life for them could be more wonderful if they knew what I knew and had what I had.

But Alma's insightful message continues: "But behold, I am a man, and do sin in my wish; for I ought to be content with the things which the Lord hath allotted unto me" (Alma 29:3).

And so we ask, "What has the Lord allotted me and what am I to do with it? I feel so much and yet there seems to be so little I can effectively do."

"Why should I desire more than to perform the work to which I have been called?

"I do not glory of myself, but I glory in that which the Lord hath commanded me: yea, and this is my glory, that perhaps I may be an instrument in the hands of God to bring some soul to repentance; and this is my joy" (Alma 29:6, 9).

To do, as Alma says, the work that we have been called to perform and to be an instrument in the hands of God is our task and our joy. To allow our light to shine by virtue of righteousness is our privilege.

The light of which we speak is hard to define. If you are like me, when you look in the mirror you don't always see a radiant glow. And yet, it is with us in some form. Not long ago a friend and I were walking through a very large department store in a very foreign part of this world. It is in settings like this that you recognize that as a Latter-day woman you are but a mere speck on the surface of the earth. As we slowly strolled up and down the aisles, a woman approached us and said in English, "Where are you from?" When we responded, "Utah," her eyes lit up. "Are you here to attend the Mormon conference tonight?" I don't know why she approached us. I was in travel-worn clothes, weary from jet lag, and I can't think there was any glow about me, but maybe, just maybe, it was that light of which we speak.

As sisters in God's great kingdom, we have opportunities to let our light shine, to serve and to bless, to perform, as it were. We don't stand on rooftops and beam our light into the sky. But we go to work and make a difference, as Elder Maxwell has stated, "within our allotted 'acreage.'"ii As our daily lives are intertwined with those around us, we create an atmosphere wherein love can be nurtured and flourish. We make decisions based on principles. We teach by the words we use and the actions we take. We increase the light in our personal spheres by reaching out, by doing and by being.

I share with you the experience of a young Latter-day Saint mother living in Japan. Her neighborhood is an eclectic mix of people from around the world. For the most part

they are families, who are raising children and trying to create stability in a turbulent environment. Because of the always-impending likelihood of earthquakes in that part of the world, this mother decided that it would be helpful to invite her neighbors to an emergency preparedness gathering. She took a simple approach. She contacted the designated local shelter and arranged a tour. She then produced a small flyer on her computer, and she and the children walked the neighborhood distributing the information on doorsteps. Her children were rather skeptical. “What if no one comes?” they asked. “It won’t matter,” their mother replied. “Then we will do it ourselves.” The following Saturday morning, fifty-two people showed up. They walked together to the shelter where they were greeted and given information on procedures and supplies. So excited were these neighbors that they began to organize themselves to meet on a regular basis. The neighborhood welcomed an opportunity to rally together, to increase their friendship, and to improve their surroundings.

This mother was simply working within her allotted acreage, which was her neighborhood, using the things she had learned in the gospel setting. It did not involve a great deal of work or time. It was a small extension of life, as she knows it.

Letting our light shine among our neighbors is a great place to start. President Kimball told the women of this Church, “We desire women to develop social refinements because these are very real dimensions of keeping the second great commandment—to love one’s neighbor as oneself.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Part of that social refinement is learning to be articulate. As LDS women we need to articulate the gospel in a righteous way.

Again President Kimball has said, “We should be as concerned with the woman’s capacity to communicate as we are to have her sew and preserve food. Good women are articulate as well as affectionate.”^{iv}

During recent focus groups held in Arizona, stake and ward mission leaders were asked to identify what prevented them from sharing the gospel with their nonmember friends. The overwhelming response named *fear* as the greatest deterrent. Fear of losing a friendship, fear of sounding self-righteous, fear of not being able to explain questions of doctrine.

Women by nature love to share. We share recipes; we share books and movies; we share information on child rearing, on husband endearing (or enduring as the case might be), on planting flowers, or cleaning our showers. But when it comes to sharing the thing which brings us the most happiness, the greatest joy, and provides the very core of our souls, we become fearful, or, at the least, timid.

The Lord through his prophets has addressed our fears. “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7).

On one occasion, while standing on the street in Salt Lake City, a woman approached me, asked a couple of questions, and then launched a verbal attack. She began

by categorizing Mormon women as brainwashed and subservient. She accused us of coercing our children and stripping them of their abilities to make independent decisions. (She obviously didn't know some of our children.) She claimed we forced others to our way of thinking. She implied that Mormon women were illiterate and mindless. Her anger and misguided information could not be argued. She had clearly formed a judgment against us that was so comprehensive I knew I could not turn it around. Frankly, I didn't dare try because she was much bigger than I am, and I was certain that one blow from her hefty arm would find me a blob on the sidewalk.

I could do nothing but listen and let her unload. After what seemed endless minutes of painful verbal abuse, she appeared satisfied that she had sufficiently impacted me with her message. When we speak of fear, I can tell you that I knew fear at that moment. I felt physically threatened as well as painfully wounded by her words. When she had exhausted her attack she fell silent.

And then in that moment, I began to respond, saying the only thing I could think of to say. "Someday," I said, "you may open your door to some young Latter-day Saint missionaries. Before you slam it, please remember that somewhere they have a mother just like you and just like me, who is praying for them and for those they meet. Then you might want to say, 'I met a Mormon woman once, and she told me that she was the happiest person alive. She said her happiness did not come from riches or fame. Her happiness was rooted deeply in her heart and came from a rich understanding of life and her connection to her Savior. She said she lived with a kind of joy and peace that comes from God. She said she wished that I, too, could know that kind of joy.' And then at that point, if you want to, you can tell those young missionaries, 'Thank you, but I am not interested in your message!'" The woman hung her head for a moment, quietly muttered, "thanks" then turned and walked away.

Sisters, I learned that when all else fails, just speak from your heart. We need not be timid nor do we need to defend ourselves. A simple expression of feelings can often diffuse an attack.

Mary was saying good-bye to a wonderful neighbor. On a number of occasions, Mary had tried to share the gospel with his dear friend, and though her neighbor was cordial, she did not appear to be interested. Mary wondered what she could give as her as a going away gift. A Book of Mormon seemed bold, but it seemed right. And so it was that Mary inscribed the book in this way, "I wanted to give you something that was nearest and dearest to my heart, but I didn't think you would like five more children. So instead I am giving you the other thing that means the most to me." Her friend wept as she read it. It was a gift given in love and received in love.

"Be not afraid, only believe," said the Savior (Mark 5:36).

A young woman recently greeted missionaries of another faith at her door. A returned missionary herself, she felt sensitive to what they were doing. She said ordinarily she would have thanked them and sent them on their way, but this day she decided to put

aside her fear and brighten her light just a bit by extending herself a little further. She engaged them in conversation and acknowledged their work. She commended them for their faith and then expressed her own faith in a living prophet who speaks in God's behalf. When they encouraged her to accept their literature, she suggested that they trade literature. The conversation that began in a rather cold way soon warmed, and they parted company in a friendly manner, each knowing a little more about one another's faith.

For the most part, Latter-day Saint women do not lack in belief, but sometimes we lack the confidence to express our beliefs in forthright, but accepting, ways.

No one can argue with personal conviction. Our conviction does not always bring that same conviction in others, but it generally brings respect from those who know us. We do not have to be alike to respect and then to love one another.

Simple honesty stated with confidence and clarity brings about understanding.

Heather is the mother of a seven-year-old daughter who has fallen in love with Irish dancing. This newfound love calls for competitions that are held on a local, regional, and national level. When the first competition schedule was distributed, Heather quickly noticed that several events were scheduled for Sunday. Heather approached the teacher and explained that Sunday was a family day. They attended church services and discouraged any family participation in organized sports or other events on Sunday. The teacher listened respectfully but stated that the schedule must remain as outlined. Some days later, the Sunday schedule again came up. This time, Heather was not there, but a non-LDS friend was there. This friend stated in simple terms. "Heather and her family are Mormons, and it is against their religion to participate in these kinds of things on Sunday. They believe in the commandment of keeping the Sabbath Day holy." The teacher brightened. I did not understand that it was a religious commitment. In that case," she said, "we will reschedule the Sunday competitions."

Heather later stated, "In my effort to not offend or to appear self-righteous, I skirted the issues. I did not state my position with confidence and clarity."

An LDS woman shared this experience with me. She had just moved into a new Salt Lake City neighborhood. A nonmember neighbor came to her door with a plate of cookies and a bottle of wine. The LDS woman did not want to offend her new neighbor or appear to be pious. There was an awkward moment, and then the woman just simply stated, "Thank you so much, but I am a Mormon, and therefore I do not drink wine."

"Oh, that's all right," stated her new neighbor. "You eat the cookies, and I'll drink the wine!" This simple honesty gave birth to a lasting friendship.

President Kimball clearly recognized that women would become a major force in moving this work forward: "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 they are seen as distinct and different—in happy ways—from the women of the world.”v

President Kimball believed in us. President Hinckley likewise believes in us. Listen to his recent comment at National Press Club in Washington D.C.: “People wonder what we do for our women. I will tell you what we do. We get out of their way, and look with wonder at what they are accomplishing.”vi

[Seems to me, we better be accomplishing!](#)

The time has come. It is here and now. We have an audience poised and waiting for us. Women across this earth hunger for our light. They long for our knowledge and the peace that it brings.

In a Gallup poll called “The Twenty-four Hour Spiritual Practice Survey,” 91 percent of the respondents stated that they believe in God, 82 percent stated that they experience in their lives a need for spiritual growth, 80 percent say they have a personal relationship with God, and 75 percent say they pray daily.vii

According to research done by Wirthlin Worldwide, women were asked to rate the things they considered most important in their lives.viii At the top of the list were the following:

1. Having a successful marriage
2. Raising a family
3. Developing personal relationships
4. Growing spiritually

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The stage is set—everything is ready. Women across this world want what we have. And we can help them find it. We can listen to them. We can talk with them. We can acknowledge their feelings and offer understanding and acceptance.

Sometimes it is difficult. One day I found myself sitting at a lunch table with a group of women I did not know. The conversation turned to focus on men and soon deteriorated into some ugly generalizations. *All* men, they concluded, were of a sinister and evil nature, and those who professed otherwise were liars. I was angered and upset by these blanket accusations. For days, I brooded, and my anger increased. One day it dawned on me that their words and feelings were a reflection of their experience. They had, unfortunately, each been the victim of a man who was lacking integrity and had in some way lost their trust and respect. That understanding allowed me to replace anger with compassion.

Women come easily to compassion and love and sensitivity. The Lord will use these gifts and all others we possess as we open our hearts and lives to Him. As we prayerfully

approach each day, do we ask for inspiration to be His servant? Do we willingly place ourselves in His influence to be used in His way? Do we truly allow ourselves to become an instrument in His hands?

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 1155).^{ix} A call to live as women of God.

This Church is on a roll. Things are moving at a fast pace. It is such an exciting time to be a Latter-day Saint. Never before have our voices been so needed. We have our work cut out for us.

We are not without leadership in this. In fact, the counsel to us has been very specific: "Let us as Latter-day Saints reach out to others not of our faith. Let us never act in a spirit of arrogance or with a holier-than-thou attitude. Rather, may we show love and respect and helpfulness toward them. We are greatly misunderstood, and I fear that much of it is of our own making. We can be more tolerant, more neighborly, more friendly, more of an example than we have been in the past. Let us teach our children to treat others with friendship, respect, love, and admiration. That will yield a far better result than will an attitude of egotism and arrogance."^x

I have a dear friend who is a good Jewish woman. The week following general conference and the Palmyra Temple dedication, that friend, Mary Kay, asked me about it. "Oh, it was wonderful," I said. "In fact, it was so glorious I could hardly stand it." And then, quite spontaneously, I added, "Oh, Mary Kay, I love this church *so* much!" And she answered by saying, "I know you do, and I think your church is lucky to have you."

And do you know what? I think the Church is lucky to have us, and we are lucky to have the Church, because we love it, and we can express that love in ways that will be heard and felt.

"The simple fact is that we *do* know that God lives, that Jesus *is* the Christ, and that this is their cause and their kingdom. The words are simple, the expression comes from the heart. . . .

"It is something that cannot be refuted. Opponents may quote scripture and argue doctrine endlessly. They can be clever and persuasive. But when one says, 'I know,' there can be no further argument. There may not be acceptance, but who can refute or deny the quiet voice of the inner soul speaking with personal conviction?"^{xi}

If we want to be a part of this, we must move! And we must move with confidence and assurance that the Lord is on our side and will use us to accomplish His work. May we not let a day go by without committing our services to the Lord. It may only be a word to the right person at the right time. It might be only an action observed or a thought expressed,

but may our lives speak of our knowledge and testimony.

We are the believers. And we have a solemn responsibility to articulate our beliefs in word and action and in a spirit of love and acceptance. The women of this Church individually and collectively can and will make an enormous difference in the days ahead. May we put our fears aside and let our light shine. May we speak with confidence and clarity. May we listen with love and understanding.

In closing, I share a personal experience. Not long ago I recounted to my father an afternoon I had spent while working with some women who, during the course of the day, engaged in Mormon bashing. There were slanderous innuendoes leveled at the Church and Church leadership. In relating this experience I said to him, “I didn’t like being there. I don’t want to be with them again.” His response was simple. He said, “The only way to change them is to make them your friends.”

And so I add to that my simple testimony that “the only way to change them is to make them our friends.”

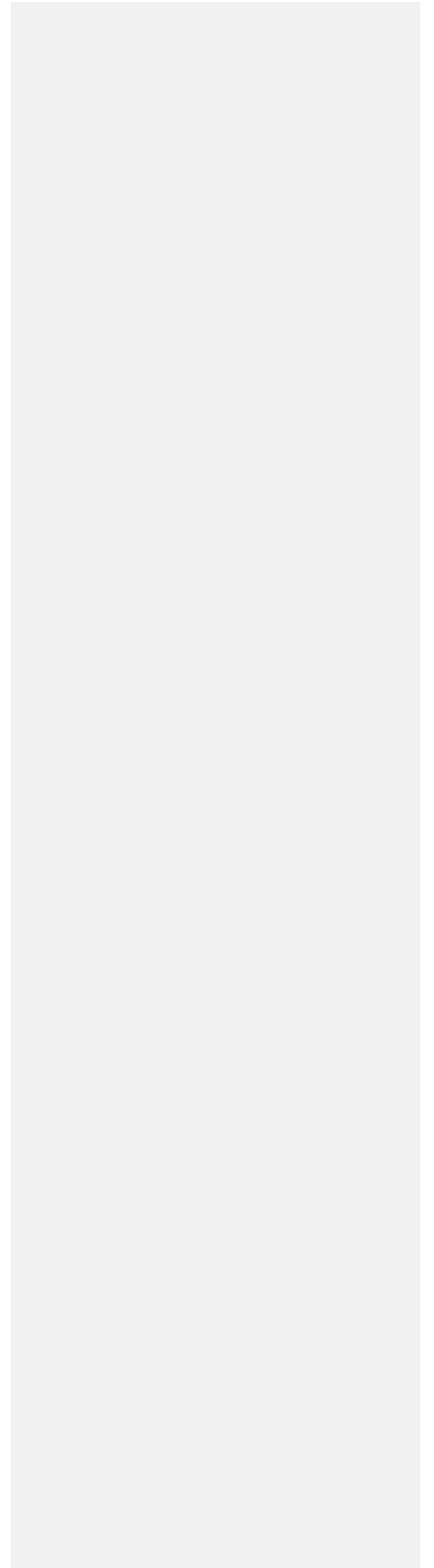
“O that I were an angel, . . . that I might . . . speak with the trump of God. . . .

“But behold, I am a [woman], and . . .

“. . . I do not glory of myself, but I glory in that which the Lord hath commanded me; . . . that perhaps I may be an instrument in the hands of God to bring some soul to repentance; and this is my joy” (Alma 29: 1, 3, 9).

ENDNOTES

i Mary Ellen Smoot, "Come, Let Us Walk in the Light of the Lord," *Ensign*, November 1998, 89.



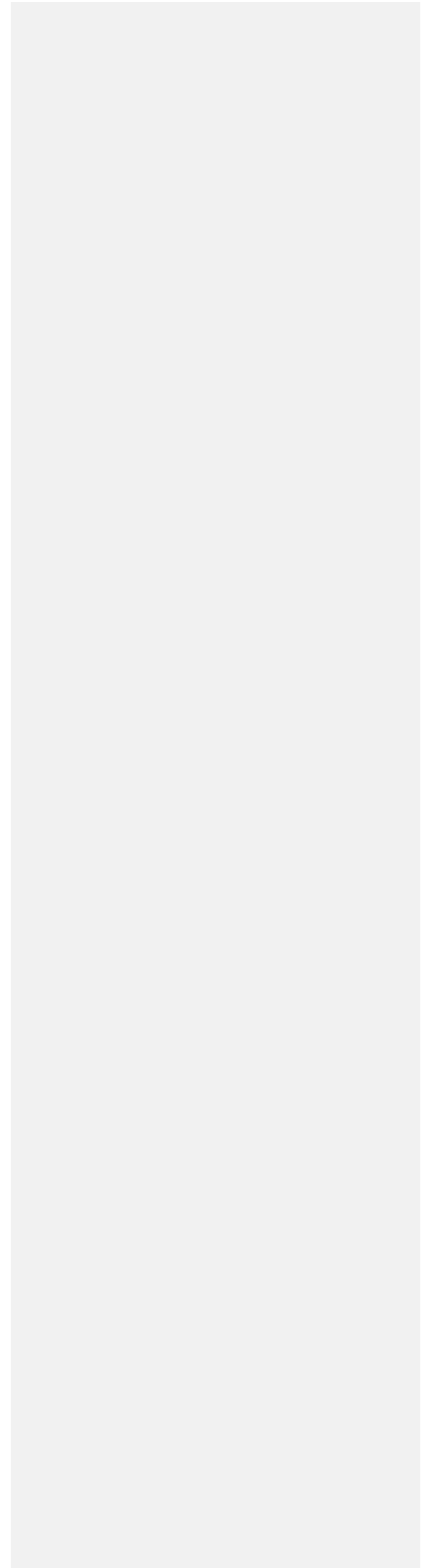
ii Neal A. Maxwell, “Content with the Things Allotted unto Us,” *Ensign*, May 2000, 72.

iii Spencer W. Kimball, "Privileges and Responsibilities," *Ensign*, November 1978, 104–5.

iv Kimball, "Privileges," 104.

v Spencer W. Kimball, "The Role of Righteous Women," *Ensign*, November 1979, 103–4.

vi Gordon B. Hinckley, quoted in “Church Leader Addresses Growth, Efforts to Improve People’s Lives,” *Church News*, 18 March 2000.



vii George Gallup Jr. and Timothy Jones, *The Next American Spirituality: Finding God in the Twenty-first Century* (Colorado Springs: Cook Communications, 2000).

viii Wirthlin Worldwide, August 1996, 1006 adults surveyed in the U.S.

ix Sheri L. Dew, “We Are Women of God,” *Ensign*, November 1999, 99.

x Gordon B. Hinckley, "A Time of New Beginnings," *Ensign*, May 2000, 87.

xi Gordon B. Hinckley, "Testimony," *Ensign*, May 1998, 70.