

# ***“Transforming Transitions”***

BONNIE D. PARKIN  
Relief Society General President

---

*This address was given, at the 2002 BYU Women’s Conference*

© 2002 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](mailto:womens_conference@byu.edu)  
Home page: <http://womensconference.byu.edu>

---

When I stood at this podium last year, I secretly rejoiced that my days of speaking to enormous—albeit kind—crowds had come to an end. Four weeks ago, I stood at the Conference Center podium and learned otherwise. As the saying goes, the only constant in life is change (especially in Church callings!). And change can be difficult—it challenges us, tests us, refines us. It gives us experience which can be for our good (D&C 122:7) if we choose to make it so.

Change is the movement from one state of being to another. Hopefully, our movement is one of progression—eternal progression—from grace to grace, darkness to light, weakness to strength (D&C 93:12–13, 28). I’ve learned that this period between two states—the transition—is a precarious place where who the Lord knows we can become intersects with who the adversary wants us to become; we choose between diminishment or growth.

I’ve experienced many transitions in my life. I was raised on a farm about twenty miles from here, in Herriman, Utah. I herded cows; I weeded potatoes; I gathered eggs. I was such a farm girl that my high school mascot was Beetdiggers!

My transition to Utah State University was easier because of new friends, but quiet longings for home were sometimes almost more than I could bear. After graduation, I started teaching third grade: thirty-three seven-year-olds in one room. That’s what I call a transition! But it was then I was introduced to my husband-to-be. Blind dates do work.

Our beginnings were in a small basement apartment in Salt Lake City while Jim was

completing his schooling, and our first son joined our family. We then transitioned to Seattle, far from family and friends, where Jim finished postgraduate training. Like most young couples, we struggled to make ends meet. I remember paying our tithing with the last few dollars and wondering how we'd get by. And then we received a note to our year-old son, Jeff, from my brother Rodney, saying, "Here is some money for ice cream." It was a fifty-dollar bill, and fifty dollars went a lot further in those days.

While we were in Seattle, three more sons were born. As a young mother, I soon found myself herding sons, gathering toys, and weeding bubble gum from hair. For me, these Seattle days were a transition with needed growth and great mentoring from good women who shared how they had weathered their transitions.

When Jim accepted a position in Utah, I cried when we had to leave that ward and those Saints. But transitions can't be escaped.

An easier transition was the addition of four daughters, whom I obtained the easy way: our sons married them. And even better was becoming the grandmother of eleven grandsons and three granddaughters, with a fifteenth grandchild to arrive this summer.

Transitions will always be with us, stretching and shaping us. Currently, I promise, I am undergoing a big-time transition.

Early on the last morning in February, our phone rang. The voice on the other end asked if Jim and I would come down and visit with President Gordon B. Hinckley at 11:00 A.M. Wouldn't you say that's the first sign of a big-time transition? Jim and I knelt in prayer, asking Heavenly Father's help to accept and do whatever His prophet asked of us. We reread our patriarchal blessings to remind us of who we are. And then we left for 47 East South Temple.

President Hinckley asked about our health and especially my hearing. I explained that eleven days after arriving in the mission field, I had lost the hearing in my right ear, which has never returned. He then asked, "How is the hearing in your other ear?"

I said, "It's fine."

"Well," he responded, "just turn your head."

That's his style: do what works. Then he extended the call that began this latest transition. Your many kind words of encouragement and support have gratefully eased my way. Still, there are many facets of this calling that are daunting, that require great faith, that challenge growth. Transitions are an essential part of growing up; I hope I will grow up soon.

What do you remember about transitions in your life? What made them difficult? What made them easy? For me, there was one sure way to weather transitions well. It is to feel that you belong, that you are not alone, that you are loved. Who do you know that's going through a difficult transition right now? Could you help them feel they belong and are

loved?

If I could have one thing happen for the women of the Church, it would be to feel the love of the Lord daily in their lives. That pure, sweet love, called charity, eases all transitions. Through living, loving prophets we have been given an organization to build our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, to feel His love, and to extend that love to all. The Relief Society is that organization.

Have you noticed how President Hinckley shows his concern for every member of the Church? I marvel at how he constantly extends a hand of inclusion to every one of us. His travels around the globe to meet the Saints where we live can't be a cakewalk for a ninety-one-year-old. And yet by going the extra thousand miles, he's saying that each of us is loved with that pure love of Christ. How well are we saying that?

For our Relief Society sisters, two crucial transitions make a big difference between retention and lost sheep, between activity and inactivity. One is for our newly converted sisters moving into our ward or branch family; the other is for our eighteen and nineteen-year-old sisters moving from Young Women into Relief Society. The quality of these two transitions has eternal ramifications.

One of the sweetest blessings of Relief Society is getting to know other women. How I would love to know each of you individually! And yet for a new convert or young adult woman feeling outside existing friendships, this blessing of sisterhood can be seem a transition too tough to weather. How can we ease the way? We know that three things work: (1) Know them. Know their name. (2) Include them. (3) Mentor them.

The week after being sustained, I was in the Relief Society office and a bag of sky-blue cookies arrived with a note from a sister missionary on Temple Square. She had been in a precarious transition as a young woman seeking to belong in Relief Society. It wasn't easy. She wrote, "I remember being called to teach the Brigham Young manual in Relief Society when I had just barely turned eighteen years old. I was by far the youngest in the room and more than a little scared when I stood to teach my first lesson. The responsibility to teach those who had been my teachers . . . those who knew so much more than me was overwhelming, but it made me pray a lot and depend on the Spirit and seek guidance, . . . direction and inspiration. I . . . learned to ask questions that would make them think and share their insights and knowledge and experiences in relation to the topic. In short, I realized that I didn't have to know it all or do it all myself (thank goodness!)." /

These wise Relief Society leaders sensed this sister's struggle. They understood her divine worth. They reached out and got to know her. They were willing to risk a less-than-perfect lesson to include her. They mentored and loved her as she took those first scary steps toward belonging. A precarious place became a safe place.

Each sister is of divine worth—our young sisters! Our newly baptized sisters! Our less-active sisters! Our Heavenly Father knows the value of youth. After all, He chose a

fourteen-year-old to bear the awesome load of the gospel's restoration.

A few weeks ago I was in Munich, Germany, where I attended Relief Society. The Relief Society president had returned home to care for a sick child; the child of the only other counselor also became ill, so she too went home. At the last moment, the sister missionaries were asked to teach the lesson on personal revelation. I watched in awe as these two young women in their early twenties stood to do something that in other circles of society would be close to impossible. One conducted the meeting, and the other—with help from a ward sister—led the discussion. And do you know what? We felt the Spirit of the Lord. We were about fifteen in number, yet the sisters honestly shared their experiences of how they had received personal revelation. They spoke of how the Holy Ghost had prompted them and brought them peace.

Throughout the world, teenage girls are serving as Primary presidents, Sunday School teachers, Young Women leaders and teachers. If given an inspired call, our young women can immediately begin serving as visiting teachers, class instructors, and musicians. Young women can help us build faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and powerfully teach the doctrines of the kingdom of God. We can help them understand their divine worth and the joy of serving in Relief Society.

One recently baptized British sister wrote to us, saying she didn't feel like she belonged because she didn't have a calling like everyone else had in the Church. Then, when she was called to serve as a visiting teacher, she finally felt like she belonged because she knew the importance of having a call. She felt, also, that she was trusted.

We desire all women to feel the Savior's love and to know that He values them. We help them feel His love by the way we treat them. You sisters who are in Relief Society, do you know the names of those sisters in transition? Have you introduced yourself, gotten to know them? Have you invited them to sit by you? Have you asked them to share their talents?

You Relief Society sisters serving in Young Women: Do you express your love for this divinely inspired organization? Do you respect Relief Society with the young women you are teaching? Your attitude toward Relief Society influences young women's attitudes toward Relief Society.

Mothers, do you foster in your daughters a love for this wonderful sisterhood? Please do so, because a mother's feelings and expressions about Relief Society will be mirrored by her daughters.

Leaders, do you extend to those capable sisters a call to serve so they can experience charity in their lives? Are they included in meaningful ways? Do you look to them for contributions to the group? Do you mentor them? Do you pray for them? Do you take time for them?

Charity is the attribute which defines us. We must all help all our sisters to feel that charity, that true love of Christ.

Young women who go away to school and transition into a university ward seem to make the transition with ease. Why? Could it be they experience just what President Hinckley said that new converts need—what all our sisters in transition need? (1) A friend. (2) A responsibility. (3) Nurturing by the good word of God.

I pray that every woman can experience a positive transition from her current position into Relief Society. I have confidence that each woman in this conference can make a difference in the life of a sister in transition.

I also believe in commitment and accountability. Each woman at this conference can assist a sister transitioning into Relief Society. Would each of you forget for just a moment about yourself and your own concerns and think specifically about just one sister in transition whom you can help feel the love of the Savior by involving her in our great sisterhood? If you have a pencil, take it out and maybe write that sister's name whom you could personally help. If you can't think of her name, create a mental image of her face in your mind. Then put your commitment into action. Find that sister—help her make her transition with love. Now, when you've had a wonderful experience in this transition of another daughter of God, please write and share with us your success; it will enrich us also.

Each individual woman in a ward or branch Relief Society can be like the yeast in the bread dough that makes it rise. The principle is taught in Galatians 5:9: "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Each one of us is that leaven. And as we feel the divine love and gain compassion, as stated in Jude 1:22—"And of some have compassion, making a difference"—we can be the some who truly make a difference in the lives of our sisters.

Sisters, remember, remember who we are: covenant women of divine worth with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We must remind our sisters in transition who they are, welcome them, help them belong, let them bless us with their gifts. As we do this, we will all feel an increased measure of His love, even the love of Jesus Christ. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

---

**Notes:**

1. Correspondence, Relief Society historical files, Salt Lake City.