

***“Women of Dedication, Faith, Determination, and Action”***  
Elder M. Russell Ballard  
of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

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That music was beautiful, and it is wonderful for me to be here with you at this final session of your women's conference. I just pray that you will feel that it was wonderful to sit here for another 45 minutes. I'll do my best. My dear sisters, I hope you have enjoyed this conference. Barbara and I are honored to be with you in this final session, and we express our deep love to each and every one of you.

William R. “Max” Carey Jr., founder of a Fortune 500 company, told this story: “Not long ago I had the chance to do something I’ve always wanted to do—meet my wife’s boyfriend from high school. We’ll call him Billy Bob. I had only seen photos of the guy. Anyway, we’re in my wife’s hometown and walk into the general store, and there is Billy Bob behind the counter. It turns out he’s the store manager. After talking for a few minutes, I can hardly wait to get back into the car to hear Susan’s reaction. I say, ‘Gee, Susan, wasn’t it great to see Billy Bob after all these years?’

“‘Uh-huh,’ she replies.

“‘What did you think?’ I ask.

“‘Nothing much,’ she says.

“‘There is a long silence. I can’t hold it any longer.

“‘Susan,’ I say, ‘I’ve just got to ask you one question. Aren’t you glad you married me? I mean, aren’t you glad you’re married to the CEO of a successful company instead of the manager of a general store?’

“‘Well, she looks at me as only a wife can and says, ‘Let’s get one thing straight here, Max. If I’d married Billy Bob, he’d be the CEO of a successful company, and *you* would be the manager of

a general store.”<sup>1</sup>

I can relate to Max because Barbara has had the same impact on me.

We laugh at this story because we know there is some truth in it—women really do have remarkable influence.

No one can do what you sisters can do to help move the gospel kingdom forward and make the world a better place. No one.

You have been divinely endowed with a unique kind of discernment and strength that differs in some ways from the gifts our Heavenly Father gave His sons. These differences are intentional and eternal. They don't make you better than a man, nor do they make you inferior to him. They just make you different—wonderfully, deliberately, everlastingly so.

When you join with other women of covenant in unity and harmony, there is no limit to your influence for good.

I have witnessed your significant and eternal influence in individual lives as well as in families, and I have seen it in countless cultures and countries around the globe. I have also seen what you can accomplish in branches, wards, stakes, missions, temples, and general Church assignments. Your contributions in small and large businesses and charities, as well as in civic, educational, health, and sports organizations, are immeasurable.

I am particularly impressed by your ability to nurture—to care for and encourage the healthy growth or development of others as you help shepherd them along the covenant path. This is a gift from God and is an important part of your divine endowment from a loving Heavenly Father.

Your efforts to nurture in the family, the Church, the school, the community, and in the professional world have been a blessing to many, including those who are deceived, lonely, hurt, sick, and aging. This is a Christlike attribute—a blessing to a world that desperately is in need of nurturing.

I have been the beneficiary of a lifetime of nurturing by the incredible women in my life, beginning with my mother and extending through the years to my wife Barbara, my sisters, my daughters and daughters-in-law, my granddaughters, my friends and colleagues, and faithful women leaders with whom I am privileged to serve. For the next few minutes I would like to share with you some of what I have learned from these women of determination, faith, dedication, and action, in the hope that you may be as inspired by their insights as I have been.

It was 22 years ago that I spoke in conference both in April and October about the power of councils with faithful women participating. Your insight and counsel is absolutely essential. Today the Lord has richly blessed the Church and the world because there are more sister missionaries serving faithfully in mission leadership positions and participating in mission

leadership councils. More are receiving their endowments earlier, thereby enlarging the number of temple covenant women serving in the Church. The sister leaders of the general presidencies pray and speak in general conference. And significantly, now the general women's meeting is the first session of general conference.

I know some women wish they could find more stories of women in the scriptures and in our history. We need to develop the skill to find their influence, like one young sister. She said, "Mormon must have had an amazing wife to have raised a remarkable son like Moroni!"

If you look carefully and with the right spirit, you can find similar manifestations of effective nurturing throughout the scriptures.

For a number of years now, the Church has been focusing attention on the faithful sisters in the Church and their contributions. For example, I invite you to examine the topic of "Women of Conviction" on the Church History Library webpage.

Remember, the role of the pioneer sisters was remarkable. When writing about the Mormon pioneers, non-LDS author Wallace Stegner noted that he had admiration for the men, but stated, "Their women were incredible."<sup>2</sup>

As we look for and find women in our scriptures and in our history, we will see far better the power and influence women have in our family, community, the Church, and the world.

I realize that women often deal with a kind of ambiguity not necessarily faced by men, as there is an endless array of choices as well as uncertainties in front of you. This can be particularly challenging today because the world offers women an increasing number of opportunities—many more than were available to women a generation ago. In fact, in my lifetime we have seen numerous women appointed and elected to public offices, fill positions as CEOs of major corporations and organizations, and admitted in increasing numbers to prestigious business, law, and medical schools.

Joseph Smith said in 1842, "I now turn the key to you in the name of God, and this society shall rejoice and knowledge and intelligence shall flow down from this time—this is the beginning of better days [for women]."<sup>3</sup>

We are seeing the fulfillment of this prophetic vision as new opportunities and advancements for women unfold in unprecedented ways.

Women today are told that they can "have it all": education, careers, church service, marriage, and family. However, most women discover that this is not always true. As Meg Whitman, an American business executive and political candidate, once said in reference to the question of whether you can have it all, "I actually don't think so. I think you can have a wonderful life, but you have to decide what trade-offs you're willing to make."<sup>4</sup>

Balancing everything among all of the available options can be a challenge. In the end, most of us have to choose among competing options to determine what is best for us.

Of course, we have a divine pattern to follow as outlined in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” but we know that mortality can be complicated. Many women are single for long periods of time in their lives. Some women are married; others become single when a spouse dies or when they divorce. And some women may never marry.

Nevertheless, if we are faithful and endure to the end, no righteous desire will be denied, and all blessings—allow me to repeat that for emphasis—*all blessings* ultimately will be received.

Each of you must come to know what the Lord wants for you individually, given the choices before you. Sister Julie B. Beck said, “The ability to qualify for, receive, and act on personal revelation is the single most important skill that can be acquired in this life.”<sup>5</sup> I agree with her.

Once you know the Lord's will, you can then move forward in faith to fulfill your individual purpose. One sister may be inspired to continue her education and attend medical school, allowing her to have significant impact on her patients and to advance medical research. For another sister, inspiration may lead her to forego a scholarship to a prestigious institution and instead begin a family much earlier than has become common in this generation, allowing her to make a significant and eternal impact on her children now.

Is it possible for two similarly faithful women to receive such different responses to the same basic questions? Absolutely! What's right for one woman may not be right for another. That's why it is so important that we should not question each other's choices or the inspiration behind them. And we should refrain from asking hurtful and unsupportive questions like “Why are you going on a mission?” or “Why aren't you on a mission?” or “Why aren't you married?” or “Why don't you have children?” We can all be kinder and more thoughtful of the situations in which our sisters throughout the world find themselves as they seek to follow the will of our Heavenly Father in their individual lives.

Of course, it isn't always easy to refrain from questioning. That is especially true when our sisters and brothers make choices that seem to us to be wrong. For example, during the April general conference this year, a handful of men and women voiced their opposition to the sustaining of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. While it was inappropriate in that setting to actually vocalize their opposition, it was certainly within their respective rights to oppose. If that were not so, why would we ask for a dissenting response each and every time we sustain Church leaders?

As members of the Church, we should not be critical of those who have sincere, heartfelt questions or concerns about their faith. Remember, the Restoration in all of its glory and wonder was launched in response to a spiritual question of a 14-year-old young man. Such questions can be a catalyst to real conversion if they prompt us to seek truth in the light of faith.

In that respect, the Prophet Joseph Smith provides a good example of how to find answers when we have concerns, questions, and even doubts. He wanted to know if he could receive forgiveness, and he wanted to know which church was true so he could join it. In a very real sense, the Restoration was launched by young Joseph, who felt unsure of the doctrine he was learning in the Christian churches of his day and was unsatisfied by the answers and explanations he was getting.

He later explained, “The teachers of religion of the different sects understood the same passages of scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible.”<sup>6</sup>

He added, “At length I came to the conclusion that I must either remain in darkness and confusion, or else I must do as James directs, that is, ask of God.”<sup>7</sup>

And that, ultimately, is where Joseph Smith found the answer to the questions of his soul. He found inspiration through reading the words of the holy scriptures. But he found the truth on his knees in a grove of trees near his home.

Today we live in a world in which people don’t ask of God—they seem to want to ask of Google. Even when it comes to questions of faith, there are many who trust the Internet to provide accurate, fair, and balanced answers to their questions more than they trust the ultimate source of truth, our Heavenly Father. It’s as if they believe that the scripture in James actually says, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of the Internet.”

Please don’t misunderstand, sisters. I am not saying that we should never search the Internet for information about the Church’s history, its teachings and doctrine. What I am saying is that we need to be prudent and careful about seeking answers to spiritually important questions online. We’ve all heard people make jokes and sarcastic comments about how you can’t trust everything you read on the Internet. There’s a good reason for that. It’s no wonder that many people emerge from their online search for religious truth feeling surrounded by the same kind of “darkness and confusion” that Joseph Smith felt after talking to the various religious teachers of his time.

In his book, *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today's Internet Is Killing Our Culture*, Andrew Keen compares the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, a professionally researched and edited work by experts who rely upon the best scholarship of our day, with certain popular Internet sources that do not distinguish between expert and untrained contributors and often blur the distinction between careful scholarship and biased opinions.

Doesn’t it make sense, sisters, to carefully consider the source of the information, especially in regard to matters of eternal significance? None of us here today would solicit medical advice for a family member with a life-threatening illness from an untrained or unlicensed person posing as a medical expert. We seek information from those who are trained with appropriate medical and health service degrees from accredited institutions. Even then, we would likely seek a second opinion.

Why then would we trust our faith and our eternal souls to websites that contain information posted by ill-informed or biased bloggers posing as experts, and predatory propagandists who seek to destroy faith—faith in God, faith in Jesus Christ, faith in the Bible, and faith in the restored Church of Jesus Christ?

Paul warned the early Saints not to be “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.”<sup>8</sup> Today the Internet is full of those lying in wait to deceive the uninformed and inexperienced.

In our search for gospel truth, we not only need to find reliable sources but we also need to give the Lord equal time in our daily pursuits. We need to study the scriptures and the words of the Lord’s servants. We need to be living right before God—we need to be doing His will.<sup>9</sup> And we can never overstate the importance of taking our spiritual concerns directly to God and trusting His inspiration and guidance.

But then, most of you already knew that, didn't you? You are here at this women's conference not because you doubt, but because you believe—or because you want to believe. I commend you for your desire to fortify your faith with the information and testimonies that have been shared with you here, and I salute you for the powerful goodness of your lives. I celebrate your spirit, your intelligence, your compassion, and your integrity. I love that you can be unified in faith and purpose without sacrificing your individuality or your diversity. We need you, all of you, individually and collectively, for the service that you as a unique, individual daughter of God can render, drawing upon your distinctive strengths and talents, insights and experiences, priorities and perspectives.

Remember the Apostle Paul’s teaching on this subject when he said that the body of Christ (meaning the Church) is composed of many members. He said, “[Shall the foot] say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body . . . ? If the whole body were an eye, where [was] the hearing? . . . And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee.”<sup>10</sup>

He explained the difference in this way: “God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him.”<sup>11</sup>

Given the differences among the various members in the body, Paul pled with the Saints that “there should be no schism . . . the members should have the same care one for another.”<sup>12</sup>

I invite you devoted sisters today to make sure that no schism or division exists within your families or your Church congregations, even with regards to such potentially divisive subjects as the current conversation regarding women and the priesthood. Church leaders have clarified this doctrine, so let us deal patiently with one another and treat each other with Christian kindness and respect despite our strong feelings and deep differences that may exist. Our focus should seek a perspective that embraces all of eternity, not just the here and now.

President Harold B. Lee once said the Church is the scaffold with which we build eternal families. Elder L. Tom Perry observed, “There are two principal reasons why I appreciate President Lee’s metaphor for the Church—as scaffolding for our eternal families. First, it helps me understand what the Church is. Second, and equally important, I understand what the Church is not.”<sup>13</sup>

That’s an interesting perspective, isn’t it? Although the Church plays a pivotal role in proclaiming, announcing, and administering the necessary ordinances of salvation and exaltation, all of that, as important as it is, is really just the scaffolding being used in an infinite and eternal construction project to build, support, and strengthen the family. And just as scaffolding is eventually taken down and put away to reveal the final completed building, so too will the mortal, administrative functions of the Church eventually fade as the eternal family comes fully into view. In that context, it’s important to remember that our Church assignments are only temporary, and that at some point we will all be released either by our leaders or by death. But we will never be released from our eternal callings within the family.

If members of the Church who worship in the temple are attuned, they will come to realize that the Lord has marvelous blessings in store for His faithful daughters and sons throughout eternity.

And what are those blessings? This contextual insight from Elder Dallin H. Oaks explains, “The purpose of mortal life and the mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is to prepare the sons and daughters of God for their destiny—to become like our heavenly parents.”<sup>14</sup>

He adds, “The purpose of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is to help all of the children of God understand their potential and achieve their highest destiny. This church exists to provide the sons and daughters of God with the means of entrance into and exaltation in the celestial kingdom. This is a family-centered church in doctrine and practices. Our understanding of the nature and purpose of God the Eternal Father explains our destiny and our relationship in his eternal family. Our theology begins with heavenly parents. Our highest aspiration is to be like them. Under the merciful plan of the Father, all of this is possible through the atonement of the Only Begotten of the Father, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.”<sup>15</sup>

This is extraordinary doctrine, my dear sisters, both in its supernal majesty as well as its fundamental simplicity. The gospel story is a family story—nothing really more, or nothing less. It begins with heavenly parents, and it ends with children making their way through the sometimes exhilarating, sometimes overwhelming challenges of mortality and back to their heavenly home, having received all of the essential ordinances of eternal exaltation.

That’s the story of our lives. God has given us the outline, but He leaves it up to us to flesh out the details through our choices and our faithfulness. There is an extraordinarily happy ending in store for all who desire it. But before we can claim it, we have to become more than just His children—we have to become His disciples.

Of course it is a remarkable thing to know that all of you sisters are daughters of our Heavenly

Father, who loves you, and you love Him. But let's face it: you didn't have to do anything to become His daughter. You just *are*, and you always shall be. But you *do* have to do something to become His disciple. You have to choose to believe. You have to choose to follow the prophets and apostles. You have to choose to bend your will to His. You have to choose to have faith now and forever.

Being His daughter is a matter of birth. Being His disciple is a matter of choice, and the righteous exercise of your God-given agency.

That said, let me pose an all-important question: What matters most in our discipleship?

Life is filled with distractions that have potential to lead us away from the core teachings of the Church—especially the Atonement of Jesus Christ. I have observed that many of those who start to lose the Spirit have forgotten the very reasons they embraced the gospel in the first place. For the vast majority of us, the prime reason we accept baptism and the other ordinances and participate in this work with all our hearts, minds, and strength, has little to do with policy or programs. We did not join the Church because of its position on social issues or because of past practices. We joined the Church because of the gospel's core and eternal message. We joined the Church because the Spirit bore witness that the Prophet Joseph really did kneel in a grove of trees and did see the Father and the Son, and that the Savior's Church in its fulness has been restored.

The Prophet Joseph Smith said this: "The fundamental principles of our religion [are] the testimony of the apostles and prophets concerning Jesus Christ, . . . 'that he died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended up into heaven'; and all other things are only appendages to these, which pertain to our religion."<sup>16</sup>

The Atonement of Jesus Christ is at the heart of our message! It is our core value. It is our doctrinal center. It is the heart and soul of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

During the last U.S. presidential campaign, media attention around the world focused on the Church in unprecedented ways. One of our mission presidents and his wife discovered that during their visits to universities, churches, and civic groups, and during their interviews for TV, radio, and newspapers, people wanted to focus on things that obscured our message.

They found it helpful to publicly read the sacramental prayers and remind those listening that these are the most quoted prayers and the most quoted scriptures in the Church, and that the administration of the sacramental emblems is the most repeated ordinance in the Church from Alaska to Argentina and from Australia to Asia.

In this ordinance, Latter-day Saints promise to always remember the Atonement of Jesus Christ. They take upon themselves the Savior's name and promise to keep His commandments and always remember Him.



If any one of you has not yet felt the truth and the power of the Savior's Atonement in your life, I invite you to refocus on the central message of the Restoration—a message declaring that we can be “made perfect through Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, who wrought out this perfect atonement through the shedding of his own blood.”<sup>17</sup>

Sisters, please do whatever is necessary to stay focused on the simple and central message of the Restoration. Accept it. Understand it. Embrace it. Love it. Share it. Defend it.

After the Atonement, there are a number of other spiritually important things that can help us remain strong and faithful and focused in our discipleship. These things include personal and sincere daily prayer and thoughtful scripture reading, regular fasting with a purpose, and worshiping at church and in the temple.

The First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles want proper preparation and thoughtful partaking of the sacrament on a regular basis to help keep our members anchored to the Lord Jesus Christ and His gospel.

I am not talking about merely attending sacrament meeting. I am talking about worshiping Heavenly Father and the Savior in sacrament meeting. We worship Them in sacrament meeting by singing, praying, meditating, listening carefully to the sacramental prayers, and partaking of the sacrament, which prepares us spiritually for the coming week. We must prepare ourselves and our families a long time before the meeting begins, to have a spiritual experience that binds our hearts to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Sisters, this is just one hour in the week to reflect upon your lives. You might think of it as having a personal interview with yourselves with no smart phones, no tablets, no distractions!

As noted earlier, we partake of the sacrament repeatedly, as often as 48 times each year. Added up, a lifetime of partaking of the emblems of the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ can bring us precious blessings.

Last October in general conference, I pleaded with all the members of the Church to “stay in the boat and hold on!” I promise you in the name of the Lord and through the apostolic keys I bear that no safer place can be found in all the world than in keeping the covenants you have made to follow the Father and His Son and those who hold the keys of the priesthood. If you will do so, you will find personal and family peace, and your homes will be filled with love.

Now my sisters, in closing you knew I would ask you to do something. I'm just asking you to do the same thing that the prophet Joseph Smith asked the Relief Society sisters to do in Nauvoo when he said, “The [Relief] Society is not only to relieve the poor, but to save souls.”<sup>18</sup>

“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.”<sup>19</sup> Please help us to keep the Church moving forward with increased faith in

the lives of our individual members.

Righteous and faithful women have always played an essential role in saving souls and defending the kingdom of God. However, you women of this last dispensation have especially important roles and responsibilities to fulfill. You are women of determination, faith, dedication, and action.

Listen to the testimony of Jane Robinson, a 19th-century English convert: “I believed in the principle of the gathering [to Zion] and felt it my duty to go although it was a severe trial to me, in my feeling to leave my native land and the pleasing associations that I had formed there; but my heart was fixed. I knew in whom I had trusted and with the fire of Israel’s God burning in my bosom, I forsook home.”<sup>20</sup>

Today, all of you sisters have spiritual roots that go back to Kirtland and Nauvoo. Even though you may not trace your personal family history back to those amazing sister-disciples, you are spiritually heirs to the same blessings because you have received the same ordinances and have made the same covenants.

You have been baptized into the Lord’s Church. You have received the gift of the Holy Ghost, and many of you have been endowed and some of you have been sealed in the house of the Lord.

Like faithful sisters in the past, you need to learn how to use the priesthood authority with which you have been endowed to obtain every eternal blessing that will be yours.

Today more than ever, we need faithful, dedicated sister-Saints who, like Jane Robinson, have hearts that are fixed, who trust in the Lord, and who “with the fire of Israel’s God burning in [their bosoms]” are willing to save souls and build the kingdom of God.

On behalf of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve, I extend our love to each and every one of you. I ask our Heavenly Father to bless you that you may have the peace and the calm assurance that what you do within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is essential to the growth and the preparation of this world for that day when the Lord and Savior whom we all love will say, “It is enough,” and will come to rule and reign. May every righteous desire of your hearts be granted unto you as I leave you my witness and my testimony that this Church is the Church of Jesus Christ, Joseph is His prophet of the Restoration, and Thomas S. Monson is His prophet today. The work will roll forward, but it cannot fulfill its true destiny without rolling forward hand in hand with you faithful, wonderful sisters of the Church, to which I witness and testify and leave this blessing with you humbly in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

## Notes

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1. <http://www.inc.com/magazine/19910901/4813.html>

2. Wallace Stegner, *The Gathering of Zion: The Story of the Mormon Trail* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 13.

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  4. *The Early Show*, CBS, December 19, 2000; as quoted in Jane Clayson Johnson, *I Am a Mother* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2007), 51.
  5. Julie B. Beck, “And upon the Handmaids in Those Days Will I Pour Out My Spirit,” *Ensign*, May 2010, 11.
  6. Joseph Smith—History 1:12
  7. Joseph Smith—History 1:13
  8. Ephesians 4:14
  9. See John 7:16–17
  10. See 1 Corinthians 12:15,17, 21
  11. 1 Corinthians 12:18
  12. 1 Corinthians 12:25
  13. L. Tom Perry, “The Church: Scaffolding for Our Lives,” Brigham Young University–Idaho Devotional, January 24, 2012.
  14. Dallin H. Oaks, “Same-Gender Attraction,” *Ensign*, October 1995, 7.
  15. Dallin H. Oaks, “Apostasy and Restoration,” *Ensign*, May 1995, 84.
  16. Joseph Smith, *Elders’ Journal*, July 1838, 44.
  17. Doctrine and Covenants 76:69
  18. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 453.
  19. M. Russell Ballard, “Women of Righteousness,” *Ensign*, April 2002, 70.
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