

“The Moral Force That is Within You”

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Sisters, I am humbled by this opportunity to be with you this afternoon. I hope my thoughts and experiences will be an inspiration to you as you use your moral influence.

I see our moral force, authority or influence as a power that is significant into the eternities. I see this moral force as having the power to impact families, the Church and communities for good. It’s an influence that is felt by those we directly and indirectly interact with, that has “ripples” that make their way beyond our immediate sphere. The power of this force is not determined by your rating as an “influencer” in society—those with significant numbers of followers on LinkedIn, Facebook or Pinterest—but by the good that stems from individual actions that follow the promptings of the Spirit. These promptings and actions promote the good things in the world—the gospel, families, our Savior Jesus Christ, peace, joy, etc. The wickedness in the world is increasing, and the gap between the Lord’s ways and the world’s ways is growing. So the experience, influence and venues available to all women in the gospel have increased in importance to maintain the voice of what is right. Today more than ever, our influence is important for the building of the kingdom of God, for raising children, for supporting families, and for keeping the Lord’s priorities *our* priorities regardless of the voices from the world.

Elder Christofferson said, “[Our] intuition is to do good and to be good, and as [we] follow the Holy Spirit, [our] moral authority and influence will grow” (D. Todd D. Christofferson, “The Moral Force of Women,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2013). We each must be a part of the growing influence and authority—this is the work of salvation, and we *must* participate!

If our moral influence is important for the building of the kingdom of God and for assisting those around us in choosing the kingdom of God over the praise of men, how can we nurture and develop it? How can we be prepared and be ready to use our moral influence for good? Not surprisingly, the answers lie within the gospel basics. Our preparation and power are dependent on our relationship with our Heavenly Father and the Savior. We must be constantly striving to

strengthen our testimony and stay close to the Lord so we can have the guidance of the Spirit. To be a positive influence in the Lord's efforts, we must be aligned with Him in prayer, thought and service. *Daughters in my Kingdom* teaches us that "with faith in God and an understanding of the eternal significance of [our] responsibilities, Relief Society sisters of all ages continue to uphold and defend truths that strengthen homes and families. [We] guard the sanctity of the family in many different roles: as mothers and grandmothers, as daughters and sisters, as aunts, and as teachers and leaders in the Church" (*Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society*, 159).

We must prioritize our relationship with our Heavenly Father and build our faith with Him. As members of the Church, we have the Holy Ghost to guide us in prioritizing our service to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ and the daily responsibilities and obligations we have. The temple can help us maintain or adjust our alignment with the Lord. President Ezra Taft Benson said, "When you attend the temple and perform the ordinances that pertain to the House of the Lord, certain blessings will come to you: . . . You will receive the key of the knowledge of God (See D&C 84:19). You will learn how you can be like Him. Even the power of godliness will be manifest to you. (See D&C 84:20)" ("What I Hope You Will Teach Your Children About the Temple," *Ensign*, Aug. 1985, 10). This knowledge and power is essential for us as we seek to nurture and develop the moral influence within us. We must attend the temple.

Just as prioritizing the work of our Heavenly Father nurtures our moral influence, keeping our covenants with the Lord is an important part of the same nurturing. Our actions and efforts demonstrate our personal righteousness and our commitment to our covenants, allowing us to have the guidance of the Holy Ghost. Are we studying the words of the prophets old and modern and the teachings of the Savior? Are we following the direction and promptings of the Spirit when they come? Our personal righteousness determines the Spirit's ability to speak to us. Just as the Liahona was provided to Lehi and his family for guidance, we can be given the same guidance we need in the wilderness of mortality if we live worthy of the Spirit. Lehi and his family decided follow the Lord's commandment to venture into the wilderness *before* they knew where they were going. They didn't look and see the compass pointing to a beautiful, peaceful land filled with the comforts of their home in Jerusalem. They awoke to find the Liahona just outside Lehi's tent, and they followed where it led each day (1 Nephi 16:10). The night before the Lord told Lehi to "take his journey into the wilderness" (1 Nephi 16:9), Lehi had already determined that they were going to go wherever the Lord sent them—for eventually they would reach the promised land. They didn't know what the Lord's journey entailed, but they were on board, or at least most of them were. They'd already left Jerusalem and their lives as prosperous members of the community. They chose to prioritize the direction they received, and they were on the Lord's errand.

We individually are probably not going to be asked to leave the comforts of our homes and head into the wilderness. But we are all going to wade through a figurative wilderness at numerous

times in our lives. We are going to receive daily direction from the Spirit on how to use our moral influence. The Spirit will guide us in our efforts as the Liahona guided Lehi's family.

We may not know much more than what direction to begin each day. The promptings of the Spirit and the teachings of the prophets will guide us. How will we ensure that we stay on the Lord's errand, nurturing and developing our testimonies? The Liahona worked for Lehi and his family based on their faith in God and their righteousness, just as the Spirit works in our lives based on our faith and actions. We learn from Alma as he instructs his son Helaman about the Liahona that "It did work for them according to their faith in God; therefore, if they had faith to believe that God could cause that those spindles should point the way they should go, behold, it was done; therefore they had this miracle, and also many other miracles wrought by the power of God, day by day. Nevertheless, because those miracles were worked by small means it did show unto them marvelous works. . . . And now, my son, I would that ye should understand that these things are not without a shadow; for as our fathers were slothful to give heed to this compass (now these things were temporal) they did not prosper; even so it is with things which are spiritual. For behold, it is as easy to give heed to the word of Christ, which will point to you a straight course to eternal bliss, as it was for our fathers to give heed to this compass, which would point . . . them a straight course to the promised land" (Alma 37:40–41, 43–44).

The prayers that we offer asking for the Spirit's guidance, the words of Christ that we read, and our actions give us the direction that we need. These will be faithful steps that bring about marvelous works in our lives and in the lives of others. These are the faithful steps that point us on a "straight course to eternal bliss" and our "promised land."

President Uchtdorf has taught us that general conference is not an ordinary blessing. He said, "The words spoken at general conference should be a compass that points the way for us during the coming months" (Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "No Ordinary Blessing," *Ensign*, Sept. 2011). In the past several general conferences we have been called on to stand up for the doctrine of Christ, for the gospel, and for what is right (Ann M. Dibb, "Your Holy Places," April 2013; Thomas S. Monson, "Dare to Stand Alone," Oct. 2011; Elaine S. Dalton, "Be Not Moved!" April 2013; Jeffrey R. Holland, "The Cost—and Blessings—of Discipleship," April 2014; Neil L. Andersen, "Spiritual Whirlwinds," April 2014). We need to use the extraordinary blessing of modern-day prophets to direct our lives and set our course. We must choose to be the moral influence for good that Elder Christofferson calls on us to be ("The Moral Force of Women," *Ensign*, Nov. 2013). Jesus Christ "marked the path and led the way" ("How Great the Wisdom and the Love," *Hymns*, no. 195). Recommit to follow Him and influence others to do the same.

Our testimony of Jesus Christ gives us the power to influence others for good. Elder Bednar teaches us that "a testimony is [a] personal knowledge of spiritual truth obtained by revelation. . . . Testimony brings increased personal accountability and is a source of purpose, assurance, and joy." He continues, "Seeking for and obtaining a testimony of spiritual truth requires asking,

seeking, . . . knocking (see Matthew 7:7; 3 Nephi 14:7) with a sincere heart, real intent, and faith in the Savior (see Moroni 10:4). Fundamental components of a testimony are knowing that Heavenly Father lives and loves us, that Jesus Christ is our Savior, and that the fulness of the gospel has been restored to the earth in these latter days” (David A. Bednar, “Converted unto the Lord,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2012).

If we have not yet gained a personal testimony of these core things, or if it has failed us in some way, we must start developing it now. We must strengthen it. If we do, we must also ensure that we have a testimony of the things Satan is attacking more subtly, like the doctrine of Christ, and right and wrong. President Monson, Elder Christofferson, Sister Dalton, Elder Holland, Sister Dibb, Elder Anderson and so many other leaders in the Church have called on us to use our voice to proclaim these things. Seek that testimony now. The Lord needs you, me, and all of us to be an influence for good and to proclaim the gospel truths that we know.

One of my dearest friends from college taught me a lot about living the gospel. He chose friends and associates based on what they had in common, the way most of us do. However, he had more friends through his life that supported him in his efforts to live the gospel than most of us. Since college he has lived in Arizona, California, Illinois, South Carolina, France, and the Netherlands—what some of us in Utah might refer to as “the mission field.” He taught me that personal efforts to live the gospel are paramount to anything else. These efforts provided him with the blessings of the Holy Ghost and the teaching and testifying opportunities that come with its companionship. He taught me that the daily personal efforts we put forth to study our scriptures, pray, attend the temple, fulfill our callings and home and visiting teaching assignments, as well as gathering to worship and renew our covenants, are paramount. They keep our testimony strong regardless of the size of our church congregation or the faith of our friends. This foundation of testimony creates opportunity to use our moral influence in the world around us—and as more people around us have differing opinions, we must strengthen our testimonies and invite them to join us.

These efforts also introduced him to a lovely woman, who converted, married him in the temple, and is now a mother in Zion, as a result of his using his moral influence. His strength in the gospel was attractive to those he met, regardless of their faith. Valiant effort, not perfection, is required for influencing others for good. Being courageous and testifying of truth in big and little ways is needed. These efforts strengthen us spiritually and influence others for good. We cannot leave the work of guiding society and our communities to those who do not look to Heavenly Father for direction. We must choose to be the influencers and challenge the adversary regardless of the numbers of members of the Church around us. We must keep our testimonies strong through daily efforts to keep our covenants.

The Savior taught us in Matthew, “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and

it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:14–16).

We can use our moral influence to light and strengthen our families, church and communities, as only women can. President Hinckley called on the “women of the Church to stand together for righteousness. [We] must begin in our homes. [We] can teach it in our classes. [We] can voice it in [our] communities” (Gordon B. Hinckley, “Standing Strong and Immovable,” Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting, Jan. 10, 2004, 20). These are everyday opportunities to use our moral influence and let our light shine. We don’t have to make large and grandiose actions. It can be as simple as having a conversation and “bearing spontaneous testimony” (David A. Bednar, “Watching with All Perseverance,” *Ensign*, May 2010).

A dear friend of mine of another faith and I were talking just a month ago. She was thrilled that I was now married. I was a little surprised at her level of excitement and joy that was in her voice. And then she said something like this: “I know how much you’ve wanted to be a mother, and I’m so glad we can now be mothers together.” It’s just my husband Ty and I for now, and we’re hopeful that the Lord will bless us with children. But what’s important about this story is that I have a friend who wanted to be a mother with me. We bonded over motherhood as only two women who love children and place a high value on family life can. Not everyone does today. Over many years of friendship, we have bonded over our deep understanding of our Heavenly Father’s love for His children, His interest in our lives, motherhood and families. We have been strengthening each other’s testimonies of these important principles in our everyday lives. I am so grateful for her support of my righteous desires, and she has the same mutual appreciation.

Within the Church and outside of the Church, we need to rally around each other and be the second, third or more voice that repeats what the prophets have already told us. We need to be the angelic reminders in the midst of turmoil, chaos and contrary voices. We need to speak up and stand up together.

Sometimes everyday life brings challenges, and our previous experiences keep us from speaking up or standing with others. I know this has happened to me. Have you ever written a disastrous cause-and-effect map in your head related to an opportunity to use your moral force for good? Maybe your map looks something like this: If I do or say that, I will lose friends. If I speak up, they’ll stop listening. If I stand, our relationship will change.

In VitalSmarts’ *Influencer: The New Science of Leading Change* (Joseph Grenny, Kerry Patterson, David Maxfield, Ron McMillan and Al Switzler, 2nd edition [New York: McGraw-Hill, 2013], 49), we read that “People choose their behaviors based on what they think will happen to them as a result [of their behavior].” That seems obvious, right? We make our choices based on what we think the outcomes will be. But if you have bad information about the outcomes of choices, what decisions do you make?

The world continues to write the cause-and-effect maps of choices people face, differently than the Lord. The world says, if you get married you'll lose your "me time," get divorced and be unhappy. The world says, if you have children you'll lose your figure, they'll cost a lot of money and you won't be able to travel anymore. The Lord to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, "blessed them, and said unto them: Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Moses 2:28). We must assist the Lord in calming the fears and giving positive, confident examples of what family life can be. Did you notice I didn't say 'perfect' family life? We have to help people write different cause-and-effect maps. We have to present the options Satan and the world are leaving out: happy marriages, joy in family life, happiness that money can't buy, etc.

I have felt strongly since I first heard it in general conference in 2010 that I needed to take advantage of Elder Bednar's counsel to "bear testimony spontaneously" as we raise children, even though I am not a mother. The Doctrine and Covenants teaches us to keep the gospel in our minds, and we shall have it with us when it is time to share it. We read, "treasure up in your minds continually the words of life, and it shall be given you in the very hour that portion that shall be meted unto every man" (D&C 84:85). We learn in *Teaching, No Greater Call* what is directed at parents but applies to *all* of us as we use our moral influence inside and outside of the home:

"As parents, many of your teaching opportunities come in unplanned moments—in conversations, as you work with your children, and as family members face challenges together. These opportunities can be powerful teaching moments because they are closely tied to what your children are experiencing. Because such opportunities may come and go quickly, you need to recognize them and be prepared to teach principles that your children are ready to learn" (*Teaching, No Greater Call: A Resource Guide for Gospel Teaching, Lesson 7, "Teaching Moments in Family Life"*).

These moments may not come to me specifically, but similar moments occur with friends, neighbors and family members, regardless of their church membership or the strength of their testimony. I have been trying to listen to the promptings of the Spirit and testify of the simple truths that are part of our conversations. We need to take advantage of these teaching moments that come to us. God, our Heavenly Father, is anxious to bless all of His children, and *we* can be an instrument in that blessing. We can be the mouthpiece that brings the Spirit and truth to our earthly brothers' and sisters' lives.

Nephi taught us, "For when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men" (2 Nephi 33:1). Influencing through the heart is the best way we can actually influence someone to change. The Savior made it possible for all of us to repent and change for the better. We can win over someone's heart by honoring their choice and connecting their behavior to their moral values. We can influence others to do good or do better by helping them reconnect with their moral compass.

To influence change “we must take our eyes off the demands of the moment and cast our view on the larger moral issues by reframing reality in moral terms” (Patterson, Grenny, Maxfield, McMillan, Switzler, *Influencer: The Power to Change Anything* [New York: McGraw Hill, 2008], 98, 104, 106). Influencing anyone to change is reliant on *their* moral compass. We have to testify and help shift the cause-and-effect maps of individuals, with an increasing impact on the same maps of society. We can do this through personal relationships in our families, in the Church and in our communities. We can be the third or substitute parent, fulfill our callings, care about individuals, support those called to serve in our wards and stakes, be a parent or grandparent and friends as children seek to develop testimonies and minds, participate significantly in the political process or government, volunteer, etc.

I have several friends from my time at Colorado State whose friendship I cherish, even though they are members of other faiths. I believe there are several things that work in these relationships that have kept us close over the years, one of which is our love for families and children. I have had the opportunity to support their choice to be mothers, and the value of their work as a mother and wife. Because of previous conversations I’ve had with them, I’ve also been able to be a voice of support as they’ve struggled in their marriages, in getting their families to church, and in raising small children. I know my moral influence has been good in their lives, as theirs has been in mine. I actually have more in common with some of these non-LDS friends who are striving to raise good families than we had in common in college. A dear friend, who is now a mother of four, is working hard to build a life for her family filled with joy, faith and peace. We are closer than we’ve ever been as our lives have realigned over families. My friends, and women like them, are important allies in the building of the kingdom of God and being a moral force for good in an increasingly wicked world.

Sister Julie B. Beck, former Relief Society general president, taught us, “Mothers need not fear. When mothers know who they are and who God is and have made covenants with Him, they will have great power and influence for good on their children” (Julie B. Beck, “Mothers Who Know,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2007). And I would add, in their sphere of influence. I know what we as “daughters in the kingdom” know— that there is eternal value in bearing children, nurturing, leading, teaching, doing less, and standing strong and immovable in the “face of difficult and discouraging times” (Beck, “Mothers Who Know”). I have made a concerted effort to champion and support my sisters in and out of the gospel as they seek to raise righteous, good children. The women around us need us to champion motherhood for them—as others are calling them out of their homes and families, telling them they are of more value to a company than they are to their little or big ones. We need to be the voices that speak up for the good in the world, especially when it comes to the family. Some of us may hear the promptings of the Spirit to use our voices for their neighbors, family and friends. Others may hear the promptings to do the same and speak at a community meeting or in the Legislature. We can be mothers who can help others learn and embrace the things the Lord wants them to know.

This is my mother. My mother is exceptional in many ways. She is a “mother who knows,” as Sister Beck describes. She has taken advantage of quiet teaching moments throughout the lives of my siblings to teach us the gospel by bearing testimony. She is also a woman of great courage who is constantly using her moral influence in her home, in the Church and in the community. I listened closely as she told the story of she and my father deciding that they felt strongly that someone was missing from our family eight years after child number five was born, having number six at 38 with a very complicated pregnancy. I listened as she told me that she changed doctors because the one she had didn’t support her ninth pregnancy that brought our family child number seven when she was 41.

I have seen her stand up and fight for what is right time and time again. Her life has been filled with joys and challenges, as have all of ours. I remember her heartache when as a Beehive, I saw her passed over for a part in a large stake musical production. As a vocal performance major in college, she had passed up performing to raise her family. Now, opportunity had come, and it had passed her by. I will never forget the sadness and seeing my father comfort her. She taught me and my sisters a great lesson as she rose from her tears to be the lead in the chorus and bring her daughters and their friends in Young Women’s with her to *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. She made it excellent. She spent Saturday after Saturday, week after week, being a positive, energetic example to us girls and making it more about us than a lost opportunity. She sang in the chorus to use her talents, to make a great production worthy of inviting friends and neighbors to share the gospel with, and most importantly, to keep five teenage girls involved. She was using her moral influence for good.

I saw her take a firm stand as a Young Women’s leader in supporting the teachings of the prophets, even when it was unpopular with the youth and parents in our ward. I witnessed her voice at our local precinct at each election as she voted. I listened and supported her determination to be a faithful steward of her faith and walk our neighborhood during political seasons when she felt inspired to stand up and speak up. My father and all of her children were in awe of her determination, self-sacrifice and courage as she started conversations with people who disagreed with her politically. She wanted them to know her position. She wanted them to know her and her concerns, even if they were different from theirs. This is the fruit of her labors [Penfield family picture]. It was hard work. Sometimes she became discouraged, but she answered the call to ensure that her voice and her position—the position of the Lord—was heard by those within her influence as a mother for the last 39 years.

I too have felt the Spirit strongly in moments of opportunity. I have also found that letting my light shine is complicated. Through my years at BYU I have found myself clinging to some of the blessings of anonymity. Sometimes I want to wear my “Y” logoed apparel and my BYU bag, hat or jacket. Other times, I want to be anonymous and slip into the background, be left alone by the person sitting next to me on a plane, the store clerk or a restaurant waitress. Have you ever felt like *not* being the “Mormon” for everyone to see? This is actually what Satan wants us to feel. He wants us to cower and be quiet when opportunity for conversation or dialogue presents

itself. He wants us to pass and not go to parties or activities because people will comment on the number of our children, or the fact that you are a stay-at-home mom, or that you're a Mormon. It is one of his great tools as the world becomes busier and less personal—he isolates us. By talking to each other, we learn what we have in common. We build friendships and start to see into one another's hearts. We will have opportunities to use our moral influence as we wear our "Y's," bring our children and "be the Mormon" in the room.

I have often received inspiration and determination and strength from those around me. Watching friends and ward members and family members continue to press forward and thrive in the face of adversity, stay close to the Lord amidst chaos, and even reach out to bless others' lives while they are being knocked about by the furious winds and forces, is inspiring. The men and women who have planted themselves firmly on the straight and narrow way are incredible forces for good. Their influences can be felt far beyond their initial contacts with people. Sisters, we can be these forces for good.

I pray that each of us will take advantage of the opportunities for exerting our moral influence when the opportunities present themselves to speak up and stand up. I pray that we will each be prepared for the opportunities that will come our way as we nurture and develop our testimonies, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.