

"Be Thou an Example of the Believers"

Virginia U. Jensen

First counselor, Relief Society general presidency; wife, mother, grandmother; former director of Church building hostesses

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As the new millennium dawned, I found myself in a hospital bed. It was 3 A.M. I had not been able to sleep the entire night. Thinking back to the previous week, I recalled how very ill I had been with what I thought was a terrible case of the flu. As my temperature soared, I began having trouble breathing. A trip to the doctor determined something was very wrong, and I was sent straight from his office to the hospital. The diagnosis was confirmed—a very large blood clot on my left lung had done considerable damage.

One of the doctors who had worked with me when I entered the hospital came into my room during that early-morning hour. She was surprised to find me awake and sat down to express some concerns. Laying out her clinical synopsis and its ramifications she said, "I'm not sure you understand how serious your situation is. You could have died from this condition. People often have. And if you do get well, it could recur."

Her comments weren't exactly the sleep inducement I was hoping for. In the darkness, the good health I had taken for granted seemed like a priceless commodity, and life felt very precious. I began to consider the possibility that at what seemed the very young age of sixty, still wanting to do much more with my life and longing to spend years of time with my family members, I might not be here.

I felt an overwhelming urgency to say things to all the people I love. I thought of picking up the phone and calling them right then. I ran through my mind how the conversation might go if I were to call one of my children. I would say, "Hi, it's Mom."

In a very sleepy voice, they would reply with alarm, "Mom, are you all right?"

"Yes," I would respond. "I was just thinking about you and wondering if you know how much I love you."

They would reply, "It's 3 A.M.!"

And I would say, "Well, I am sorry to wake you, but I must ask if you know what I

believe in and what I stand for. Have I taught you all you need to know to get along well in life? Have I been the kind of example you need me to be?"

After a long pause, they would say, "Mom, what medication do they have you on?"

I decided not to call them all right then.

The sobering medical facts I had learned and my own middle-of-the-night ponderings led me to consider that my life's example might have to speak for me.

When I turned forty, I felt a need to do something notable.

I went out and had my ears pierced. When I came home, I walked past my husband, who of course didn't notice anything. Then I came to my five-year-old daughter, who barely looked up from her toys and said, "Hey, Mom, you got your ears pierced. Cool!"

Our children, no matter what age, notice everything. They see the things we do. They form opinions, values, and beliefs based on what they observe in us. I know the potent nature of example, and therefore I am struck by the value of Paul's admonition, "Be thou an example of the believers" (1 Timothy 4:1 2).

There is evidence all around us that the world desperately needs women who stand for something good and noble and righteous-even if that stand may not be popular. The world needs women who in their daily acts and deeds exemplify a higher standard. Women may not be the soldiers who lead our country into battle against evil forces, but every day they are at the front of the battle that Satan wages for souls. The example of a righteous woman-a woman who has made covenants with God and keeps them-is of paramount importance.

Others feel as strongly as I do about the power of example. Dr. Albert Schweitzer, the great humanitarian, phrased it this way, "Example is not the main thing in influencing others-it is the only thing!"¹

I am especially touched by a sentiment expressed by President Howard W. Hunter: "Sincere believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ should proclaim its truth and show by example the power and peace of a righteous, gentle life."² I realized at that moment that the example I wanted to leave for my children was, as President Hunter stated, "a righteous, gentle life."

A believer is a person who learns of God's plan and lives his or her life in accordance with the requirements of that plan. The spot I found myself in during that hospital stay in January caused me to ponder on the effect that being a believer had had on my life. I thank my Heavenly Father that I was born of goodly parents who were believers, who taught me and set a good example for me. I was thankful at that moment for Primary teachers who had labored to teach me and Young Women leaders whose example to this day

guides me.

Being a believer had brought me a sense of direction. It had brought conviction that Jesus Christ was my Savior and my Exemplar. That conviction had brought amazing, beautiful peace to my life in the past, and certainly now, when my future seemed uncertain, it brought a powerful peace. I knew that, come what may, I would be just fine-and furthermore that my family members, whom I cared about and worried about and loved so much, would be just fine. The example of the believers in my life had helped me become a believer as well, granting me the serenity I needed in that troubled hour.

Do we appreciate the power of our example? Do we value the ability we as women have to bless so many others through the simple process of our daily living and what we believe in? In all our roles in the family, in professions and the community, in our neighborhoods and in our Church callings, our actions resonate as loudly as a calling voice booms through a narrow canyon.

Example echoes, especially in our homes, where we have the most profound influence on those around us. How we treat one another, how we demonstrate our belief, thunders without so much as a word being spoken. It is encouraging to know that we can influence others so vividly, that our daily actions can mean so much. It can also be sobering, even disconcerting, to think that what we do rings so loudly. The echoes of our actions can continue to sound through many years in the lives of those we influence. A favorite poem entitled "The Echo," by C. C. Miller, teaches us:

'Twas a sheep not a lamb
That strayed away in the parable Jesus told,
A grown-up sheep that strayed away
From the ninety and nine in the fold.

And why for the sheep should we seek
And earnestly hope and pray?
Because there is danger when sheep go wrong:
They lead the lambs astray.

Lambs will follow the sheep, you know,
Wherever the sheep may stray.
When sheep go wrong,
It won't take long till the lambs are as wrong as
they.
And so with the sheep we earnestly plead
For the sake of the lambs today,
For when sheep are lost,
What a terrible cost The lambs will have to pay³

. Sisters, you and every woman within the sound of my voice can bless the lives of others in countless ways when you put into practice the principles you have learned and can

learn in Relief Society. In fact, the virtues listed in the new Relief Society Declaration, if incorporated into our lives, make us "an example of the believers." After all we can say, after all we can write, after all we can read, after all we can think, what remains is our example. How can we make certain that its influence is clear and true?

History provides many examples of good men and women, but even the best of mortals is flawed in some way or another. None could serve as a perfect model or an infallible pattern to follow, however well-intentioned that person might be. Only Christ can be our ideal, our "bright and morning star" (Revelation 22:16). Don't you love that description of the Savior? "Our bright and morning star." Have you ever noticed that problems, no matter their magnitude, seem much worse at night when it is dark and we are tired? The Savior is our bright and morning star to lead us away from darkness into the light, both literally and figuratively.

Only He can say without reservation: Follow me; learn of me; do the things you have seen me do. Drink of my water and eat of my bread. I am the way, the truth, and the life. I am the law and the light. Look unto me and ye shall live (see Matthew 11:29; 16:24; John 4:13-14; 6:35, 51; 14:6; 2 Nephi 31:12; 3 Nephi 15:9).

What a consoling summary that is of why we look to Christ as the Author and Finisher of our faith. Only in following Him, in striving to be like Him, can we find hope that the dawn will yet break, no matter how dark and dreary the night.

I feel deep gratitude for my knowledge that Jesus Christ is our Savior and our Exemplar. He has beckoned us to follow His example. "What manner of men ought ye to be?" He asks. Then, answering his own question, He instructs, "Verily I say unto you, even as I am" (3 Nephi 27:27). Elder Neal A. Maxwell reminds us that "the clear requirement that the Father and Jesus have undeniably laid upon us as mortals is to strive, individually, to become like them." [4](#)

If we want to follow His blueprint for the kind of person we should be, then we must seriously set about developing the same qualities He has. This is hard work. It will take a lifetime. The straight and narrow path is not a speedway but rather a simple, sometimes obscure, path we walk along one step at a time. Sisters, we must keep walking. And, as the hymn suggests, "Let us in his footsteps tread." [5](#)

May I mention just two of the ways in which our Savior set the example for us.

First, we can follow Jesus' example of love. The Savior was effective in blessing lives because He loved everyone unconditionally. All through His ministry, He loved and ministered to all. He made no distinctions. He accepted, valued, included, and loved everyone.

He taught, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you" (John 13:34).

He further taught: "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12).

A lawyer tried to tempt the Savior by asking Him, "Master, which is the greatest commandment in the law?" (Matthew 22:36).

Jesus answered, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matthew 22:37-39).

There was a time, when I lived in a previous ward, that I felt like nobody liked me. My struggle with this feeling seemed to be reaching a high point about Christmas time. One evening I went to my mailbox, and there was a great surprise. Someone had left a small gift with a wonderful note expressing love and admiration for me.

I cannot begin to tell you my feelings from this act. These little surprises continued for eleven more days. I tried very hard to discover who was blessing my life. No matter how clever I was—even hiding in the snowy bushes one evening for what seemed like a very long time—I never learned the identity of this angel. Nevertheless, her kindness made me feel as if everyone loved me, and it brought a healing balm. If she is anywhere within the sound of my voice, let me now say, "Thank you, dear friend. You'll never know how much your love and kindness has meant to me."

This loving person in my ward was following Jesus' example. The Savior's unlimited love was evidenced even more by His example than by His words. He served people in places that others would not go. He was criticized for being a friend to publicans and sinners. He sought out those who were suffering from the effects of physical and spiritual deficiencies. He went among the people, forgiving them, healing them, feeding them, and showing all manner of love to them. To love one another as He loves us is a vast, encompassing directive.

Second, we can follow Jesus' example of obedience.

Obedience is the first law of heaven. From His high and holy perspective, the Savior knows we can be exalted only by obeying eternal laws and accepting His atonement. Even at the tender age of twelve, He knew He "must be about [His] Father's business" (Luke 2:49). From the start of His ministry, when He submitted Himself to be baptized "to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15), to the culminating act of the Atonement, when He cried from the depths of His agony, He perfectly exemplified the principle of obedience.

The atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the most important event in all recorded history. We cannot possibly comprehend all the Savior experienced in Gethsemane and on Calvary's hill. We read about it, we talk of it, and we ponder it; but the suffering He experienced is beyond our comprehension.

When Jesus cried, "Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from

me," His request was immediately followed by, "Nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mark 14:36). His sacrifices encompass all of ours and exceed them infinitely, yet He empathizes with our relatively small struggles, knowing that they seem great to us. Each act of obedience fortifies our faith and clarifies our vision of His plan for us. As we learn and live the gospel, line upon line and precept upon precept, we become increasingly sensitive to spiritual things. We can develop that habit of obedience which characterizes the life of a sincere believer.

Our wonderful Aunt Maude was in failing health when her grandson was about to leave on his mission. He realized that this would be the last time he would see his beloved grandmother alive on this earth. Because of that, he said to her, "Grandma, I don't want to go on this mission right now." With conviction borne of a lifetime of obedience, she replied, "Oh, Adam, you must go. It is our life. It is our faith." Adam went on his mission. His grandmother passed on a few days later, leaving for her grandchildren a legacy of unwavering devotion.

Near the end of His suffering on the cross, Christ declared to His Father, "I have glorified thee on earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (John 17:4). And then in our behalf Jesus said, "Holy Father, keep . . . those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are" (John 17:11).

Whether we are building upon long years of righteous habits of love and obedience or have lately found our footing on the straight and narrow path, each of our lives can be blessed by renewed attention to Jesus' example. We can read of His washing His disciples' feet and grow in love and humble service. We can recall his utter submission to His Father's will and be moved to greater obedience. We can remember the Savior's promise in 3 Nephi, "unto him that endureth to the end will I give eternal life" (3 Nephi 15:9), and find strength, as He did, to glorify our Father during our brief stay on earth and faithfully complete our earthly missions, whatever challenges they might hold.

When I think of following the Savior, I remember President Gordon B. Hinckley's response to a Protestant minister's query, "'If you do not use the cross [as a symbol of your religion, as do other Christian faiths], what is the symbol of your religion?'" President Hinckley replied, "The lives of our people must become the only meaningful expression of our faith and in fact, therefore, the symbol of our worship." [6](#)

Sisters, the gospel is true. It will stand the test. We must consciously and deliberately choose the path of believers. The kingdom of God is moving forward with or without us. If we will move with it and be "an example of the believers," it will make all the difference in our happiness and peace of mind.

When a young woman from Singapore leaves her parents' home and begins to establish a home of her own, she presents her mother with a basket of gifts representing all the things her mother has taught her. In the basket will be found special foods, some of the daughter's handwork, paintings, or writings, as well as gifts that symbolize such virtues as patience and cheerfulness. Also included could be souvenirs from family experiences. Thus

a mother from Singapore has a vivid display of how much influence her example has had in her daughter's life.

I'd like to have that tradition here. We might be surprised to know all the ways in which our examples have touched the hearts of others. I know that when I was in that hospital room a few months ago, I felt a new and poignant kind of gratitude for the many examples of the believers who had blessed my life. I felt an overwhelming gratitude for my Savior and Exemplar.

I wanted each day of my life to be a gift of thanks to Him. I think I'll call my children now. I'll do it in the daytime so I won't disturb their sleep. I'll tell them how much I love them. I'll tell them how much I have loved being their mother. I'll tell them that I wish for them a righteous, gentle life. I'll remind them that that kind of life will bring them a powerful peace. I'll tell them that if they will be "an example of the believers" and follow the Savior's pattern of "even as I am," that no matter how dark and sleepless their night, the bright and morning star will shine for them, and they will be just fine, come what may.

1. Albert Schweitzer, quoted by Delbert L. Stapley, Conference Report, April 1969, 46; also in "The Power of Example," *Improvement Era*, June 1969, 70.
2. Howard W. Hunter, *That We Might Have Joy* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 17. C. C.
3. Miller, "The Echo," in *Best-Loved Poems of the LDS People*, ed. Jack Lyon, et al. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 312-13.
4. Neal A. Maxwell, *Even As I Am* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982).
5. 1. "Come Follow Me," *Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 116.
6. Gordon B. Hinckley, *Be Thou an Example* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 85-86.