

# Women Leaders and Priesthood Authority

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Several years ago, while participating in a BYU Women's Conference, I was approached by an older sister who asked, "How did you make it through middle age?"

I responded, "I don't know; I haven't arrived there yet."

Observing the obvious, she replied with a knowing smile, "Oh, you've made it all right—you just don't remember."

Now, years later, in another conference, I might be asked how I'm handling older age. And yes, there are some things I don't remember, but over the accumulation of years of leadership in this Church, I have learned some things that I shall never forget—things planted deep in my heart. Many insights, experiences, and important lessons over the years have helped me in gaining a deeper understanding and an eternal perspective of women leaders and priesthood authority.

We share a remarkable time in Church history and in the history of the world. We are experiencing a broader concept of leadership. For some it may require a new way of thinking. We are living in a time when our voice, our influence, may be far more powerful than ever before—if we are prepared.

President Spencer W. Kimball, speaking to the women of the Church, addressed us with these stirring words: "To be a righteous woman is a glorious thing in any age. To be a righteous woman during the winding-up scenes on this earth, before the second coming of our Savior, is an especially noble calling. [Note that he speaks of our *calling*.] The righteous woman's strength and influence today can be tenfold what it might be in more tranquil times" (*My Beloved Sisters* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 17). Leadership involving councils, cooperation, and men and women working together will increase.

We do not live in tranquil times, but they are *our* times—wonderful times as we consider the Lord's plan and system relating to women leaders and priesthood authority.

Can you imagine the emotion that could mount in a discussion about women leaders

and men in authority in the climate of our society today? In the world there will continue to be confusion about men's and women's roles in the home and in society. But in the Church, eternal principles are in place that clarify our responsibilities and provide order, opportunity, and direction. It is through priesthood authority that we are lifted up and "set apart" from the world. In view of the ever-increasing challenges and the need for leadership in an expanding church, President Gordon B. Hinckley admonishes us: "In this world, almost without exception, we must work together as teams. It is so obvious to all of us that those on the football field or on the basketball court must work together with loyalty one to another if they are to win. It is so in life. We work as teams, and there must be loyalty among us" (Devotional address, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 17 Sept. 1996).

As Elder Dallin H. Oaks explains, "The Lord's servants must do the Lord's work in the Lord's way or their efforts will come to naught" (*The Lord's Way* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991], 5). The Lord's way calls for men and women to be directed by priesthood authority and to receive inspiration from the same source.

President Hinckley issues this call: "Stand strong, even to become a leader in speaking up in behalf of those causes which make our civilization shine and which give comfort and peace to our lives. You can be a leader. You must be a leader, as a member of this Church, in those causes for which the Church stands" (*Church News*, 21 Sept. 1996, 3).

Effective leadership is hard. It's sometimes frustrating. It can be lonely, and when we are starting out there are many lessons to learn. Years ago I was called and set apart as a Laurel advisor. I was young. It was not my first calling in the Church, but it was the first time I remember having such a compelling desire to magnify my calling. My little class of twelve girls decided to have a fashion show to raise money for our stake building project. We even got Rose Marie Reid, a nationally renowned fashion designer who was a member of the Church, to agree to come and narrate our little show.

As the word spread, the project became bigger than we had ever expected. It was the first time I realized that to talk is easy, but to organize, plan, lead, manage, and succeed in accomplishing what you want to have happen are far more demanding. With more questions than I had answers for, and more people than we had room for, and more responsibility than I had experience for, I felt for the first time the heavy weight, the load, that accompanies leadership. I was in over my head.

It was then that I went to my Father in Heaven in earnest prayer. I went out into a secluded spot in nature, where I felt the most fervent prayers ever have been offered, and there poured out my heart. Not having cleared the project or even discussed the plan through the proper procedure, I accepted full responsibility. "Father in Heaven," I pleaded, "if you will just see me through this crisis so the young women will not be disappointed and the guests will not be dissatisfied and the bishop will not be unhappy with me, I promise I will never get myself involved in anything of this magnitude again."

Our Father in Heaven heard the prayer of this fledgling leader. The fashion show was a great success; it was even written up in the *Church News*. But I learned from that hard

lesson, years ago, that it is not intended that we carry the load of leadership alone—not in the Church, in the home, not anywhere. I learned that the greatest source of help for any leader comes when we turn to our Father in Heaven and seek his help. "Lead me, guide me, walk beside me" is a familiar phrase (*Hymns* [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985], no. 301). When we learn and follow the true order of heaven set up for leadership in the Church, our Father will lead us, guide us, and walk beside us. And when we have done the best we know, even in our inexperience and sometimes poor judgment, I testify from years of experience that he will see us through. He watches over us and has us in his keeping.

In the Church there are many resources available when we understand priesthood authority and Church government. I believe the Brethren are looking to the women of the Church, asking us to study the doctrine of the priesthood and understand it. Elder James E. Talmage explained: "It is not given to woman to exercise the authority of the Priesthood independently; nevertheless, in the sacred endowments associated with the ordinances pertaining to the house of the Lord, [it is clear how dramatically] woman shares with man the blessings of the Priesthood" ("The Eternity of Sex," *Young Women's Journal*, October 1914, 602).

From the writings of Brigham Young we read, "The Priesthood of the Son of God, which we have in our midst, is a perfect order and system of government, and this alone can deliver the human family from all the evils which now afflict its members, and insure them happiness and felicity hereafter" (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954], 130).

He said another time: "There is no act of a Latter-day Saint—no duty required—no time given, exclusive and independent of the Priesthood. Everything is subject to it, whether preaching, business, or any other act pertaining to the proper conduct of this life" (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, 133).

The heavens are not closed to women as long as our hearts are open to the Spirit. The prophet Joel recorded the promise of the Lord: "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, . . . your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit" (Joel 2:28–29). I bear testimony of this promise. More is required of us as women than simply to wait "in some backroom" until called upon.

If there is any question about the worth of a righteous woman's influence, her value, and her insights, consider the words of President Hinckley, speaking to the women of the Church: "I feel to invite women everywhere to rise to the great potential within you. I do not ask that you reach beyond your capacity. I hope you will not nag yourselves with thoughts of failure. I hope you will not try to set goals far beyond your capacity to achieve. I hope you will simply do what you can do in the best way you know. If you do so, you will witness miracles come to pass" (*Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997], 696).

He reminds us: "We are here to assist our Father in His work and His glory, 'to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man' (Moses 1:39). Your obligation is as serious in your sphere of responsibility as is my obligation in my sphere. No calling in this church is small or of little consequence" ("This Is the Work of the Master," *Ensign*, May 1995, 71).

We are called to take a stand, to contribute, to be accountable. This is not a time to ride the tide or to retreat. "They who are not for me are against me, saith our God" (2 Nephi 10:16). This is not a tranquil time but rather a time to participate in a meaningful way in councils, in our communities, and in our individual spheres of influence. And how broad is this influence? It begins in the home and moves out well beyond the walls of our homes, beyond the margins of our fields and the borders of our towns and cities.

No one talks to everyone, but each one of us talks to someone, and we pass the word along. The lyrics of the hymn "Behold! A Royal Army" convey the need for our united effort working together, counseling together, multiplying effectiveness as we approach the challenging days that lie before us:

And now the foe advancing,  
That valiant host assails,  
And yet they never falter;  
Their courage never fails.  
Their Leader calls, "Be faithful!"  
They pass the word along;  
They see his signal flashing  
And shout their joyful song:  
Victory, victory,  
Thru him that redeemed us!  
Victory, victory,  
Thru Jesus Christ, our Lord!

(*Hymns*, no. 251)

Yes, through modern technology we pass the word along from border to border, far and wide, and from one generation to the next. May our own words and our actions regarding women leaders and priesthood authority contribute to the victory and never weaken the line.

Today, as in times past, women shoulder responsibilities for the mission of the Church. Of our responsibility, President Kimball, addressing the sisters, said: "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. . . .

"Thus it will be that the female exemplars of the Church will be a significant force in

both the numerical and the spiritual growth of the Church in the last days" (*My Beloved Sisters*, 44–45).

When we as women attune our ears to the words of prophets as from the voice of the Lord himself (see D&C 1:38), we are lifted, elevated, and magnified in our possibilities and opportunities. From our homes will come children who have been nurtured and prepared as leaders for generations to come. There is nowhere that our influence is more important to the Lord's work than in our homes, but it must not stop there. A righteous woman's influence extends beyond the home.

### *Leadership in Church Callings*

Consider this statement from President Gordon B. Hinckley as we attempt to place a value on the contribution that can be made by women: "What a resource are the women of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. . . .

" . . . You bring a measure of wholeness to us. You have great strength. With dignity and tremendous ability, you carry forward the remarkable programs of the Relief Society, the Young Women, and the Primary. You teach Sunday School. We walk at your side as your companions and your brethren with respect and love, with honor and great admiration. It was the Lord who designated that men in His Church should hold the priesthood. It was He who has given you your capabilities to round out this great and marvelous organization, which is the Church and kingdom of God. I bear testimony before the entire world of your worth, of your grace and goodness, of your remarkable abilities and tremendous contributions" ("Women of the Church," *Ensign*, November 1996, 70).

The Lord directs his work in heaven and on earth through the priesthood. Sometimes sisters may abdicate their responsibility to fully magnify their callings because they interpret loyalty to the priesthood to mean that they should simply take direction from those in authority. We use the term *priesthood* interchangeably as we speak of priesthood power, authority, and holders of the priesthood and may not accept responsibility for receiving inspiration and helping to advance the work by speaking up.

On the other hand, there are those in authority, bearers of the priesthood, who may not understand the place of women leaders called by priesthood authority and so do not benefit from the power and blessing of a united effort. This must not be. Understanding priesthood is a blessing to men and women.

I learned something of my responsibility in relation to the priesthood in one of my first meetings with the Presiding Bishopric more than twenty years ago as a counselor in the Young Women General Presidency. I was new in my calling and felt somewhat overwhelmed as we approached that first meeting. I had a certain responsibility that was to be an item on that day's agenda. I waited anxiously with pen in hand to receive any direction. I was prepared to follow without question. I spoke briefly to the matter when called upon and then waited for Bishop Brown's response. He listened, paused, leaned forward in his chair with his hands folded on the table in front of him, and then asked,

"Ardeth, in view of what you have presented, what is your recommendation?" At that time in my experience I had never anticipated that the Presiding Bishop of the Church would ask for my recommendation. This was a daunting responsibility about which I was to learn more.

I was anxious and nervous and felt the weight of my calling. Just at that time my nephew Kent, on his second day of kindergarten, told his mom he had pains in his stomach and didn't want to go to school. Before trying to resolve the problem, she determined to uncover, if possible, the cause. "Kent," she asked, "what are you feeling?" He explained his concern very clearly. "Mom," he cried, "I'm afraid of the hard work and the big boys." I thought I could relate to his feelings in a strange sort of way.

A young sister who had recently been called as ward Relief Society president spoke to me of her concerns. "I am much younger than most of the sisters in my ward," she said. "I am inexperienced. How do I do it?" She might have asked, as others have, "How do I honor and sustain priesthood leaders, and how do I contribute so I will be heard? How can I be courageous and bold but not overbearing?" These questions are not unfamiliar to women called to positions of leadership. Should she interpret supporting the priesthood to mean going along with a plan she has concern for, without expressing her views? I think not. It means studying, preparing, seeking, asking. Inspiration is available to those called to lead, women as well as men, when we seek it earnestly, ask prayerfully, and work diligently. And having prepared in mind and heart, we speak up in the spirit of the work.

We read in the scriptures that if we are prepared we shall not fear. Brigham Young explained: "If you want the mind and will of God . . . , get it, it is just as much your privilege as of any other member of the Church and Kingdom of God. It is your privilege and duty to live so that you know when the word of the Lord is spoken to you and when the mind of the Lord is revealed to you. I say it is your duty to live so as to know and understand all these things" (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, 163).

Consider the theme young women are repeating worldwide in many languages as they speak of making and keeping sacred covenants and preparing to receive the ordinances of the temple. Could that theme have sprung from some academic study of teenage growth and young girls' social needs? We know that things of that nature come through the promptings of the Holy Spirit after much preparation. When led by the Spirit in our callings, we learn things we didn't know on our own. Vision and revelation come by the power of the Holy Ghost, which is bestowed on *all* members of the Church through the laying on of hands. As the Lord declared, "On my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:18).

The power of inspiration is one of the resources available to my young Relief Society friend. I wanted to help her know how to avail herself of that resource. "Tell me about your call," I asked. She said, "The bishop gave me a wonderful blessing. I feel the weight and responsibility for all the sisters in the ward, and I don't even know them." Her voice revealed her concern as well as her dedication.

Consider the unique and significant elements related to the common yet remarkable process followed in calling people, men and women, to leadership in this church. As we consider the setting-apart blessing, we are drawn to a deeper understanding of the meaning and the blessings associated with the authority of the priesthood. "The laying on of hands, for example, is a tangible representation of the link necessary to transmit a blessing, gift, or priesthood authority from one person to another" (Richard O. Cowan, "Instructions on Baptism for the Dead," in *Studies in Scripture, Volume One: The Doctrine and Covenants*, edited by Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989], 493).

What is it that sets us apart as leaders in the Church from a leadership position in any other organization? It is just that. We are *set apart*. We are lifted up, given access to blessings, inspiration, and revelation to do the Lord's work in the Lord's way. Through Christ we are lifted up (see Moroni 9:25).

The setting apart by priesthood authority provides a different arena in which to do our work. The principles are different from those of the world. The practices are different. And the outcome is different.

Another important blessing is the process of being sustained. President Hinckley tells us, "It may appear as a somewhat perfunctory exercise. But I remind you that it is an act of grave and serious importance, an act required under the revelation of the Lord" (*Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley*, 69).

Our sustaining of others as indicated by a raised hand should temper our judgment, increase our patience, and seal our lips against any murmuring and our thoughts against any criticism of those we sustain. Our having been sustained by others should strengthen our faith and increase our confidence. In this spirit we work together, men and women.

### *Men and Women Working Together*

It is not a new discovery, and it comes as no surprise to anyone, that men and women think differently and see things differently and respond to life differently. We are supposed to. The insights, the unique perspectives, experience, and points of view of both men and women are needed to accomplish the work. We need to understand our differences as being complementary and unifying, not divisive and separating.

Bruce C. Hafen, speaking at the BYU Women's Conference in 1985, gave this insight: "Consider the implication of [the cliché] a woman leads with her heart, a man with his head. This essentially says that a woman can't think and a man can't feel. Just as it is good for a man to have tender feelings, it is good for a woman to have a thoughtful, probing, and well-educated intellect. Masculinity has no monopoly of the mind, and femininity has no monopoly of the heart" ("Women, Feminism, and the Blessings of the Priesthood," address delivered to the BYU Women's Conference, Provo, Utah, March 1985).

Still, we have differences. One area of difference became obvious to me in comparing men's and women's journal entries. When I was sixteen years old, my father was

-serving as bishop, and one night six young missionaries came to our home to stay overnight before leaving for their field of labor miles away. Following that memorable occasion, I took to my journal and wrote pages and pages with all the details of an Elder Kapp, who had been one of the six elders. Years later, at the first opportunity, I searched his journal to discover what he had written of that historic occasion. Finally I came upon the page and read these words: "Met the bishop's daughter and she is cute and fun but kind of young." Even allowing for the fact that he was an obedient missionary focused on his work, this seemed to be a rather brief report of the experience. Just the bottom line, so to speak.

We have in our family the separate journals of my grandfather and grandmother, describing how they left Utah in a wagon with their young family and headed north to Canada. Reading their individual accounts of the same day, one would wonder in many cases if in fact they were on the same journey. Their accounts were so different—yet they were equally significant.

Of course, there will be occasions when men and women won't see eye to eye, for whatever reason. There may be occasions when the opportunity to express one's recommendations is not made available. But how we respond to priesthood leaders can have a tremendous influence, I believe, on the opportunities to participate, to be heard, to learn from others, and to contribute. In conversation with some priesthood leaders, I learned about natural reactions to certain leadership styles and how responses can be influenced.

The first illustration is that of a woman who is overbearing and difficult to work with, maybe a person full of "zeal without knowledge," as Brother Hugh Nibley speaks of. (I don't know anyone like that, do you?) The obvious reaction of other leaders would be to minimize or even avoid any interaction with this leader.

The second illustration is the woman who is passive and does not contribute. It is almost as though she were invisible. The reaction is to ignore her and expect nothing from her.

The third illustration is the leader who sees her role too narrowly, too stereotypically, as fragile and delicate as a porcelain doll. The reaction of other leaders is patronizing and overprotective; they might put her on a pedestal and thereby limit her growth.

The fourth leader is the sister who is very team oriented, shares a joint stewardship, and behaves as a co-leader whose contributions are vital. She is well prepared and speaks up. The reaction from other leaders is to actively solicit her counsel and help. She works with others interdependently and synergistically.

It would be well, I believe, to take a reading occasionally on our leadership style and consider the degree to which we are all responsible for the working relationship we have with other leaders.

We need not think and feel the way others do to have our contributions be of value.



We don't all need to see things the same way to maintain good relations.

However, I recall one meeting with our priesthood leaders when I left the room feeling somewhat discouraged, misunderstood, and a bit annoyed. Walking past a plant in the hallway, in my discouragement and without thinking, I reached out in frustration and hit one of the leaves on the plant. Have you ever been that frustrated or discouraged? Let me tell you there is a lesson to learn in every situation. The very next day, when I passed that plant in the hallway—you may not believe this but—the whole plant was wilted and had turned brown. It appeared dead. Someone must have forgotten the need for water, but the timing was perfect for the lesson. I paused in amazement. The plant seemed to speak to me, "If you become discouraged, you will kill the Spirit within, and if you lose the Spirit, the life needed to sustain you as a leader will soon die."

Eliza R. Snow warned of this danger in her lyrics to the hymn "The Time Is Far Spent":

Be fixed in your purpose, for Satan will try you;  
The weight of your calling he perfectly knows.  
Your path may be thorny, but Jesus is nigh you;  
His arm is sufficient, tho demons oppose.  
His arm is sufficient, tho demons oppose."

*(Hymns, no. 266)*

Following this experience, the sister who was with me on that occasion would from time to time smile and say, "Now remember, don't hit the the plant." It has been a good reminder in times of frustration.

There may be, unfortunately, circumstances when the opportunity to be heard is not made available. Even being heard is not necessarily the same as being understood. An example given by Elder M. Russell Ballard offers insight into how we might work more effectively.

Elder Ballard tells of a stake presidency who were going into a priesthood executive committee meeting to tell the brethren how a seminar for temple preparation could be held. They described the meeting: "They [the brethren] just sat there, listening to us, without any expressions of support or excitement." In their next presidency meeting, the stake presidency counseled together on how the situation could be improved. In the president's words: "It occurred to us that we had the habit of telling the high council how we were going to do things, as opposed to counseling with them and receiving their ideas and input. . . . At our next priesthood executive committee meeting we approached the temple preparation seminar in a different way. We asked for their suggestions and recommendations, and then we sat back and waited for them to respond. At first they were hesitant—this was a new way of doing things. But soon momentum began to build and the ideas began to flow. . . ."

"After the meeting one of the brethren came up to me and said, 'This is one of the most productive meetings I have ever attended.'" (*Counseling with Our Councils* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997], 85).

Surely the same principles would apply to an auxiliary presidency presenting an idea to a bishopric or stake council, or even a parent working in a family council.

I am reminded of a time when as a general Young Women presidency our preparation time had been lengthy—months long, including counseling with our priesthood leaders on what we knew were some of the weightier matters of our calling. It wasn't the style of the jewelry or the size of the manual or the color of the flags that consumed our thoughts or took our time. Those things are nice and yes, important, but must not be confused with the weightier matters.

The time arrived for the final presentation. But we worried (having invested so much) about being close-minded or biased in our opinions and not receptive to further counsel from our priesthood leaders. We knelt in prayer prior to the meeting and asked, "If this proposal is right, may the ears of our priesthood leaders be open; but if not, let them be closed, that we may not go amiss."

At the conclusion of the presentation, which was well received, as we prepared to leave, one of the priesthood leaders thanked us for our work and said, "Today, sisters, you have opened not only our eyes but also our ears." This statement by one who had not been aware of our earlier prayer was a witness to us that we had been directed by the Spirit in weighty matters.

President Hinckley speaks of what we know to be the weightier matters. He says, "The purpose of all our work is to help the sons and daughters of God find their way along the road that leads to immortality and eternal life." And he continues, "But when all is said and done, our greatest responsibility as leaders in this Church is to increase the knowledge of our people concerning their place as sons and daughters of God, their divine inheritance and their divine, eternal destiny" (*Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley*, 117).

Without strong leaders, how can the "weightier matters" be conveyed to congregations new in the faith? And how are those leadership qualities to be developed worldwide?

The Lord's hand is evident in all that is taking place at this historic time. I have been around long enough to remember when all matters pertaining to the women's organizations were funneled through the ward and stake auxiliary leaders to the auxiliary leaders at Church headquarters. From Salt Lake we received bulletins and specific direction on what to do and when. People came to the great MIA June conference from far and wide. (It doesn't seem so far and wide now, considering how the Church is expanding and extending throughout the nations of the world today.) There we received all we needed to know to run the programs, including the scripts and sometimes even the props.

When those things ended, it was a difficult time of transition for some. The communication line was changed. In order to accommodate the growth of the Church, the responsibility for making decisions had to be carried by the local leaders, within established principles and guidelines. We learned that there was only one organizational channel, and that was the priesthood channel. Auxiliary leaders on the ward and stake level would now counsel with their local priesthood leaders. Leaders, men and women, would be prepared to receive direction for their stewardships locally and seek inspiration individually.

### *The Council System*

Today there is an increased emphasis on the importance of the council system: ward councils, stake councils, and all other means of counseling together. The idea of councils is not new to our thinking. It harks clear back to the Great Council in Heaven, which we attended as spirit children of our Heavenly Father. And this year, for the first time, auxiliary leaders and priesthood leaders are meeting together as a council in the Saturday night leadership session of stake conference. This is an historic time, a wonderful time.

In an effectively working council, men and women share the vision and are united on what they want to have happen. Having a sense of ownership encourages the commitment to become part of the solution, not part of the problem. Members draw from each other's experience and inspiration, and in the process everyone grows.

In Elder M. Russell Ballard's recent book, *Counseling with Our Councils*, which I recommend to every adult member of the Church, we learn more of this heaven-inspired system of leadership. He explains: "Each council member has a responsibility to be spiritually in tune when taking part in council meetings so that he or she can make a positive contribution to the issues being discussed. . . . As we do this, our councils will be conducted in a spirit of love and compassion and will follow the example of the Lord, who 'counseleth in wisdom, and in justice, and in great mercy' (Jacob 4:10)" (p. 66).

Did you notice how he said "*each* council member"? This clearly includes the women who are present by assignment in the fulfillment of their callings. Elder Ballard writes: "Too many women leaders are underutilized and unappreciated, at times because priesthood leaders don't have a clear understanding or an enlightened view of the significant contribution the sisters can make. They too bear the mantle of presidency, and they have been set apart and blessed to assist the priesthood in bringing women and their families to Christ" (*Counseling with Our Councils*, 92–93).

The most effective councils are those in which every person's input is valued. A father shared with me the outcome of a family council in which his family determined together to develop a family mission statement and a motto. Each member participated in the council, making recommendations and contributing to the discussion. It became the unanimous decision of the council that the recommendation of the eight-year-old, even though there were teenagers with more experience, was ideal for their family. The motto was "Do what is right no matter what." Would that simple motto from a Primary child be

considered inspirational? I think so.

Sister Janette Hales Beckham, the former general Young Women president, admonishes the women of the Church to become "righteous, problem-solving women of faith." Ponder that statement: "righteous, problem-solving women of faith." Over the years I have found three steps to be helpful in organizing one's thoughts in preparation to participate in councils.

First, *make observations*. After thoughtfully considering and studying an issue prior to the meeting, be prepared to express as succinctly as possible the matter as it appears to you. Make certain it is an important matter that needs the benefit of counsel—many things do not. Your preparation will invite competence in your presentation.

Second, express concerns. Within your area of stewardship, you have not only an opportunity but a responsibility to address those things that may be limiting factors in accomplishing the work. We have a responsibility to express concerns, and when we do so in the spirit of our calling, they become the concerns of others. As we counsel together, needs and resources can be appropriately matched.

Third, make recommendations. Since that first meeting years ago with Bishop Brown, I have tried never to go to a meeting without having thought through what would be my recommendation in view of my present knowledge. Then, of course, I have been ready and willing to modify, adapt, or adjust my thinking. It is every leader's right and responsibility to seek and receive inspiration to make recommendations. When you do this, you become identified as a leader who takes responsibility—who is a problem solver, not a problem carrier.

Of course, our recommendations may not always be approved. There may be times when, after prayerful consideration, a name is submitted but not approved and further prayerful consideration is required. This should *not* put in question one's inspiration or the inspiration of the presiding authority. It more likely confirms the worthiness of the one whose name was submitted; however, other circumstances known to the presiding authority sometimes result in a different direction. It may be a matter of timing. I've learned that even when a recommendation or a proposal is right, the timing may not be, and at a later date we see the wisdom in the direction given.

I would caution against ever succumbing to the influence of the adversary by allowing a feeling of discouragement, resentment, criticism, or offense to creep in. It helps no one if we harbor resentment or hurt because our ideas are not readily accepted. Negative feelings, if allowed to smolder, can be destructive to the Spirit. Remember the message of the wilted plant: We can lose the life and light that comes from the Spirit if we are not mindful. Refusing to be offended by things that may not go our way will protect against the destructive influence of the adversary.

Responsible leadership requires thinking. In the mission field I would occasionally ask the missionaries, "Ere you left your room this morning, did you think to pray? And

when you prayed, did you stop to think?" Thinking, pondering, and praying are all part of the preparation for our council meetings, and a woman's voice when spoken in the spirit of her calling places her in a position to be valued, to contribute, and to make a difference.

When time is provided for counseling together on things dealing with the weighty matters of home and family and building the kingdom, we are more likely to be led by the Spirit. When an unnecessary amount of time is spent on plans, programs, parties, and posters, we may be caught up in doing things right but not in getting the right things done. The weightier matters must not be left to the mercy of those things that seem to demand immediate attention.

I believe the adversary would like, if possible, to keep us busily engaged in a multitude of "good" things if that would distract us from the *essential* things, the things that make all the difference. Some things matter more than others. Instead of thinking, "What shall we plan? What shall we eat? What shall we do?" we should first ask the question, "What do we want to have happen?" What we want is to lead our Father's children along the path toward immortality and eternal life. With every decision, we might ask: Will this program, this activity, this plan, move us toward or away from the goal? With all my heart I bear testimony of this principle as it applies to every effort we make in becoming effective leaders. Our administrative responsibilities must not rob us of our ministering opportunities. As we strive to pattern our leadership after Jesus Christ, the *perfect leader*, let us visualize in our minds and try to identify with his tender, inspiring example as he went about:

empowering others

healing and succoring others

inspiring and motivating others

dining and socializing with others

praying with others

serving others

The purpose of a council becomes effective when the talking and planning are followed by the going and doing.

I learned of a group of young women some time ago who were discussing a service project. But they weren't talking of painting houses or mowing lawns, as worthwhile as those activities may be. One young woman, new to her calling, sensing the weight of her responsibility as a leader among her peers, spoke up about learning to do things the Lord's way. She pointed out to the girls: "We have Maria, who belongs to our class, and she hasn't been out for two months. Furthermore, her family doesn't even know where she is. For two months she has been a missing person." This young leader, who might have been looked upon as only a child, said, "Why don't we pray for her?" Another one of the girls said, "Why

don't we pray for her and fast for her?" Then a third one participating in the council added, "Why don't we all write to her?" The Young Women leader, who later confessed that sometimes we grownups lose some of our childlike faith, explained to the girls, "We don't know where she is. We don't know where to send the letters." But she went on to support the young women by saying, "We will go as far as we can." So they fasted and they prayed and they wrote letters and sent them to the girl's home.

Should it be a surprise that a call came shortly thereafter from a family member, reporting, "Maria has called home. We know where she is. She is coming home."

Do you think it made any difference to that girl that there were letters from her peers waiting for her, carrying the message that she was wanted and loved? The leader reported that Maria showed up at school the following Tuesday for the first time in two months. Is it possible that the fervent, earnest prayers of an anxious family in behalf of a precious child might have been answered through the inspiration given to a young leader in council with her peers? Surely this is the Lord's way. When we become involved in counseling together on the weightier matters of the kingdom, we are led by the Spirit, regardless of our age or our gender.

Consider these compelling words of President Boyd K. Packer, speaking to the women of the Church in a general conference: "We need women who will applaud decency and quality in everything from the fashion of clothing to crucial social issues.

"We need women who are organized and women who can organize. We need women with executive ability who can plan and direct and administer; women who can teach, women who can speak out.

"There is a great need for women who can receive inspiration to guide them personally in their teaching and in their leadership responsibilities.

"We need women with the gift of discernment who can view the trends in the world and detect those that, however popular, are shallow or dangerous.

"We need women who can discern those positions that may not be popular at all, but are right" ("The Relief Society," *Ensign*, November 1978, 8).

I think of Eliza R. Snow, of whom Joseph F. Smith said, "She walked not in the borrowed light of others but faced the morning unafraid and invincible." There are many Eliza R. Snows among us today, and there can be many more. The Lord's way is not to limit opportunity but to expand it just as fast as we are ready. Our contribution as sisters is essential to building the kingdom.

If there is ever a time when women leaders question their value, their worth, and the importance of their contribution, let the words of President Hinckley resonate loud and clear: "I invite every one of you, wherever you may be as members of this church, to stand on your feet and with a song in your heart move forward, living the gospel, loving the Lord,

and building the kingdom. Together we shall stay the course and keep the faith, the Almighty being our strength" ("Stay the Course—Keep the Faith," *Ensign*, November 1995, 72).

Sisters, this call from a prophet of God is for each one of us, not for someone else. It is for now, not later. The call is for you, and for me, for our voice, our influence, our goodness. Do you hear the call in your heart and in your mind?

Let us go forth from this conference with optimism and patience as we stand together, serve together, and prepare to counsel in unity with men and women as never before. Directed by the priesthood of God, knowing it is the Lord's way, we can face the opposition boldly, nobly, and without fear. As the theme for this conference declares, let us not be weighed down but lifted up (see Moroni 9:25). In our leadership responsibilities, beginning in our homes, I testify that Christ will lift us up beyond our natural abilities to accomplish our work—which is, in reality, his work. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.