

*“Strength from Grace: Faithful LDS Women”*

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We are delighted to be with you again in this session. We especially thank our mothers, daughters and daughters-in-law, aunts and husbands for being so loyal so we wouldn’t be left here alone to chat only among ourselves—although that would be fun for us. Today we will each take five minutes. We thought about having the two Carols begin, followed by the two Lindas and then the two Stevenses, followed by the three miscellaneous ones among us, but opted instead to go alphabetically by our last names to eliminate any confusion. Are you as confused? I have the dubious honor of leading off this section, thanks to being a “B” in the alphabet! I will be followed by Cheryl Esplin, then Neill Marriott, Carol McConkie, Bonnie Oscarson, Linda Reeves, Carole Stephens and Jean Stevens. And by the way, the Stevens sisters are not twins or even related—just lookalikes. Rosemary Wixom will be the cleanup committee and will pull it all together as she concludes this session.

Just as there are many facets to a diamond, so also are there different facets and dimensions to gospel truths and attributes such as the one we will be discussing in this session—the gift of grace. Because we have the opportunity to meet sisters and women throughout the world, we wanted to share some of their stories relating to the various facets of grace made possible through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. We hope as we share their stories of strength, you will see how the enabling power of the grace of the Lord has strengthened you and the lives of those you love.

As I have considered the wonderful women I have met throughout the Church and around the world and considered their individual stories of grace through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, it was difficult to choose only one five-minute story to share with you today. But after studying and pondering on the different aspects of grace, the facet of benevolence as it relates to grace helped me to decide to share with you the story of Ailsa Coutts.

I felt a quick connection to Ailsa when I met her in Auckland, New Zealand about a year and a half ago. Ailsa had just celebrated her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday and had spent several days with her daughter, cleaning her home from top to bottom, including washing her windows, in preparation for our visit. Unfortunately, in her zeal to spruce things up, she tripped and fell and bumped her head and greeted me with two black eyes and a big bump on her head that had resulted from her fall. However, her spirits were anything but bruised, and much like Elder L. Tom Perry, she nearly leaped off her front porch to greet me as I walked up the pathway towards her home.

Ailsa was cheerful and absolutely darling, as you can see from this photo of her. As we entered her door, I instantly felt at home because her lovely home was so warm, welcoming and filled with love. Ailsa could hardly wait to show me the family history she had worked on for many years with her daughter as we sat together on her sofa. I wondered how she could be so cheerful at age 100 when so many much younger than herself struggle to find joy in living. Certainly her physical health contributed to her bright and happy spirit. But I learned something about Ailsa that helped me understand her beautiful and bright countenance. I am convinced it was the enabling power that Ailsa drew on for strength in her time of need. The Christlike trait of benevolence helped her to show compassion to one who came seeking her forgiveness several years ago.

When Ailsa was only 27 years old, her husband's plane was shot down over Amsterdam by a fighter pilot while Andrew was serving his country during World War II. Her husband was killed, leaving her a young widowed mother of two little girls. Interestingly, a young boy had seen Andrew's plane shot down by a German fighter plane, and he wrote down the identification number of the German plane to document the deed. Nearly 40 years later, the German pilot who had flown the plane and caused the death of Ailsa's husband contacted Sister Coutts to apologize. Ailsa freely forgave him, assuring him she held no ill will towards him. I wondered how I would respond in similar circumstances, and hoped through the gift of grace I could also be as benevolent.

Ailsa had been a widow for 73 years by the time I met her. As I thought about her forgiving the soldier who killed her husband, I could see how the divine gift of grace had enabled Ailsa to become benevolent, compassionate, and forgiving in her time of trial. This is my takeaway as I consider the life of my new friend, Ailsa. I want to grow up to be like her someday! Because the Lord is benevolent, He wants to forgive! Because Ailsa is a true disciple of Jesus Christ, I saw in her that same spiritual gift. I too want to acquire the benevolence that I saw in Ailsa, made possible through the grace of Jesus Christ. I bear my witness that grace enables us to do things beyond our own power, such as forgiving freely those who have hurt us or our loved ones. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.