

**Friday Morning Keynote Address**  
**“Lessons Learned in Inviting Christ to Author My Story”**  
**Camille N. Johnson**  
**Relief Society General President**

---

This address was given on May 3, 2024  
at the BYU Women’s Conference  
©2024 by Brigham Young University Women’s Conference  
All rights reserved.

---

For further information, email:

[womens\\_conference@byu.edu](mailto:womens_conference@byu.edu)

or write to:

253 Harman Continuing Education Building

Provo, Utah 84602

801-422-7692

Website: [womensconference.byu.edu](http://womensconference.byu.edu)

*This talk may be used for Church or personal use only, commercial use is prohibited.*

---

It is a glorious time to be a woman, a covenant woman, in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

From what, or from whom, is my optimism derived?

Let me start with my testimony that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is led by a mighty prophet of God, President Russell M. Nelson, who is the Lord’s mouthpiece on the earth today—not only for members of the Church—but for the whole world.

Why do I feel comforted, inspired, hopeful and loved when I hear President Nelson speak and when I study his words? Because He speaks for the Savior whose Church he leads. President Nelson’s words are His words, spoken as a prophet to prompt us to change and draw closer to Jesus Christ.

I feel immeasurably blessed to serve during this season. President Nelson is uniquely sensitive to us, the sisters of the Church. He is the father of nine daughters. He understands us!

President Nelson loves you dear sisters. He is concerned for our health—physical, emotional, and spiritual. He wants us to be happy. He is pointing us to the Savior who is our source of relief. Jesus Christ is the ultimate source of my optimism.

I have made a personal study of the words of President Nelson, and I listen to one of his talks every morning when I am getting ready for the day. His reassuring, hopeful, loving, prophetic messages always steel me for the challenges of the day. And I always hear something new and find myself marking and noting an insight I hadn’t had before.

Sisters, the prophet has answered my questions—or given me confidence in a place of not knowing an answer just yet.

I think he has answered many of your questions too. But I fear that sometimes we all look for answers from unreliable sources or fail to draw from the best sources—the prophet, the scriptures, and the Spirit.

We are accustomed to Google search answers—quick and concise. We ask our question and get a prompt response, and if we don't like the answer, we can scroll for an answer that suits us.

Contrast that with what the prophet has invited us to do—to let God prevail by living worthy of and learning how to recognize promptings and answers from the Holy Ghost, which requires effort.

President Nelson has said, “In coming days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost.”

Maintaining the presence of the Spirit requires effort, energy, prayer, scripture study, study of the words of living prophets, preparation for partaking of the sacrament, repentance, and personal acts of daily devotion. That, sisters, is how we will get our answers!

Perhaps you believe you don't have the time for all of that. Maybe you are pursuing your education, bearing children, nurturing, and caring for children, earning a living, serving in the Church, or caring for your parents—maybe you are doing many of those things at the same time.

I did. I hope you can learn from my experience.

What I have discovered in juggling my responsibilities is that establishing priorities is critical to success and happiness.

Love of God and love of His children. First and second.

My professional life as a lawyer was never in the top two. My work was a means to an end in blessing my family.

When we prioritize the first and second great commandments—we are letting God prevail. When we prioritize love of God and love of our neighbor and family—then the things that don't have eternal significance drop off the list.

When I was busy raising three young sons, trying to be a devoted wife, maintaining a law practice, and serving in my Church callings, there were times when my scripture study was inconsistent and mostly done in preparation for fulfilling my Sunday calling.

But what I learned is that I am far more efficient and effective when I include scripture study in my daily routine.

I get more done when I do the things that matter most, first!

When we prioritize daily acts of devotion to Heavenly Father and the Savior—including prayer, and study of the scriptures and the words of living prophets, we invite the Spirit to be our constant companion.

Then, we will receive answers and direction for our lives, and clarity of thought.

Please take note, I am not saying that letting God prevail and having the companionship of the Spirit will make your path one of ease. We are ascending. It is an uphill climb. There will be stretching moments, or stretching days, months, and years. This isn't about comfort, it's about growth, change, embracing our divine nature, and becoming like the Savior.

Sisters, I invite you to cultivate your testimony of foundational truth. Yes, it requires effort. But as we understand and embrace foundational truth, our desire to let God prevail in our lives will increase. We will invite Jesus Christ to be the author and finisher of our faith and of our stories.<sup>i</sup> We will want to give our lives over to Him, drawing strength and power from our covenant connection with Him.

I invite you to stay at the trunk of the tree.

Spend your precious time striving to understand foundational points of doctrine—that nourish the roots of the tree. For example: the nature of my covenant relationship with God; the Savior and His Atonement; how to exercise faith in Him; and the glorious plan of happiness.

Then, when you have a leaf question, consider how it connects back to the branch and then to the trunk or core fundamental doctrine of the gospel.

For example, when I am firmly rooted in the truth that God loves us and directs His work through living prophets—when I know that “trunk doctrine,” I can be content in not knowing the answer to a leaf question.

We need to pay the price to know that God's prophets are His mouthpiece, that Jesus Christ is actively leading His Church, and that we can trust Him with complete certainty even when we don't understand completely—then the leaves draw context and spiritual insight from the trunk of the tree.

I had a woman ask me recently—paraphrasing—“Sister Johnson, you're so sure about the prophet; you keep quoting President Nelson with such conviction; how do I get my own testimony of him and of 15 prophets, seers and revelators?”

I said to my new friend, and I say to all of you—experiment upon their words.<sup>ii</sup>

Desire to believe that this is Jesus Christ's restored Church because it has been organized just the way the Savior organized His Church when He was here on earth—with Twelve Apostles.

Exercising faith, plant the words of President Russell M. Nelson in your heart by prayerfully studying his messages. They are a good seed and will enlarge your soul; they will enlighten your understanding.

Keep nourishing that seedling as it begins to grow by applying the counsel of President Nelson. Sisters, I promise your seed will grow—with faith and diligence, and the reward will be delicious fruit.

For me, the delicious fruit is optimism in the face of uncertainty. It is confidence in not having an answer to every question. It is joy and grief happening at the same time. It is trusting Jesus Christ to be the author and finisher of my story.<sup>iii</sup>

President Nelson recently referred to “two valiant women—Eve, ‘the mother of all living,’ and Mary, the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>iv</sup> They are stunning examples of “turning things completely over to the Lord and trusting Him entirely.”<sup>v</sup> They exemplify letting God prevail.<sup>vi</sup>

Consider Eve. She was in the Garden of Eden. Life was good—no thorns or thistles, plenty to eat, everything peaceful. And Eve, the mother of all living,<sup>vii</sup> exercised that divine gift of agency, and in “courage and wisdom”<sup>viii</sup> she partook of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Her choice to leave the comfort of the garden for the troubles of this world allowed me, and you, to make the choice to come to this earth and be tested. Will I exercise the divine gift of agency to let God prevail in my life as Eve did?

President Nelson explained: “It was our glorious Mother Eve—with her far-reaching vision of our Heavenly Father’s plan—who initiated what we call ‘the Fall.’ Her wise and courageous choice and Adam’s supporting decision moved God’s plan of happiness forward. They made it possible for each of us to come to earth, receive a body, and prove that we would choose to stand up for Jesus Christ now, just as we did pre-mortally.”<sup>ix</sup>

Eve’s choice was not a fall down, but a fall forward, a fall upward—because she let God prevail.

I think that “few of us would...write into [the] stories [of our lives] the trials that refine us. [We would stay in the garden crafting our own narrative]. But don’t we love the glorious culmination of a story we read when the protagonist overcomes the struggle? Trials [those times that stretch us] are the elements of the plot that make our stories compelling, timeless, faith promoting, and worthy of telling. [Eve’s story is worth telling because she chose to leave the comfort of the garden. There would have been no story to tell if she had stayed].<sup>x</sup>

“Valiant,” “wise,” “courageous”—these are the words prophets have used to describe Eve’s decision.

“Were it not for [their choice], Eve and Adam “never [would] have had seed and never [would] have known good and evil, and the joy of [their] redemption and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient.”<sup>xi</sup>

Consider Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. Equally valiant, wise, and courageous, she was chosen to be the mother of the Savior of the world. President Nelson said of her: “Mary, mother of our Redeemer, was the perfect example of complete submission to the will of God. She kept confidences. In faith she endured grief.”<sup>xiii</sup> And when Father in Heaven withdrew His Spirit so that Jesus Christ could fulfill His atoning sacrifice, Mary remained with her son.

Recall her response to the angel who reminded her of an assignment she had accepted in the premortal world. “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.”<sup>xiii</sup> Paraphrased, “Let God prevail.”

Sisters, these and other scriptural heroines confirm that women who are willing to let God prevail are integral, even essential, to God’s plan of happiness for His children. As we

commemorate Mother's Day, let us celebrate the contributions of these two noble, courageous mothers who literally changed the world.

In a plea to us, the covenant women of God, President Nelson said:

“We...need your strength, your conversion, your conviction, your ability to lead, your wisdom and your voices. The kingdom of God is not and cannot be complete without women who make sacred covenants and then keep them, women who can speak with the power and authority of God...We need women who have the courage and vision of our Mother Eve.”<sup>xiv</sup>

In March 2024, President Nelson reiterated that plea:

“Sisters, we need your voices teaching the doctrine of Christ. We need your ability as women to detect deception and to articulate truth. We need your inspired wisdom in your family, ward, and stake councils, as well as in other places of influence throughout the world. Your family, the Church, and the world need you! Sisters, no one can do everything, nor should you try. However, I know how crucial your part is in building up the kingdom of God.”<sup>xv</sup>

And ever gracious and always loving, President Nelson blessed us to accomplish our purpose. He said, “I bless you to realize that your divine gifts as a daughter of God give you the power not only to change lives but to change the world!”<sup>xvi</sup>

Oh, sisters how I hope the Holy Ghost is teaching you how vital you are in preparing the world for the Second Coming of our Savior. By divine invitation, we can “prepar[e] future generations of the Lord’s Church and the world”<sup>xvii</sup> for that glorious day, if we are willing to let God prevail.

“Jesus Christ stands ready to use us as divine instruments, sharpened pencils in His hand, to write a masterpiece! He is mercifully willing to use me, a scrawny pencil, as an instrument in His hands, if I have the faith to let Him, if I will let Him author my story.”<sup>xviii</sup>

Sisters, you are hearing echoes of a talk I gave in general conference in October 2021 called, “Invite Christ to Author Your Story.” My personal story, my own wrestle is in that address.

In 2016, in the midst of nearly three decades of marriage, bearing and nurturing and loving our three sons, practicing law full-time, serving in Church callings and attending to the needs of our extended family—my husband Doug and I were called to serve as mission leaders in Arequipa, Peru. We left just after our first grandson was born. And I thought, at the time, that I knew just what it meant to let the Savior author my story. Doug and I were giving three years over to Him because we had covenanted in the house of the Lord to sacrifice and consecrate our talents and time and energy to build up His kingdom.

We returned home in 2019 to two new granddaughters. And I settled into my new roles. Our two oldest sons were married, and the youngest was in love and soon to be married. I wouldn’t have children living under my roof anymore. I returned to practicing law, and my favorite calling was as Mom and Grammy.

And then the call came to serve as the Primary General President. The comfortable narrative I had written for myself was spending time with my family, another decade practicing law to ensure financial security, and serving in my ward or in the temple.

I testify to you that in keeping the covenants we have made, we open the line of communication to receive revelation through the Holy Ghost. And it is through the manifestations of the Spirit that I have felt the Master's hand, writing my story with me.<sup>xix</sup>

What could I do with more faith in Jesus Christ and the capacity-enhancing strength and power that comes with covenant keeping? I could accept the next call from President Nelson to serve as the Relief Society General President.

Sisters, what if I had stuck with my comfortable narrative? I would have enjoyed spending more time with my grandchildren and I could have been assured the financial security I don't presently enjoy. And, I would have missed a stretching, soul-searching, and faith-building experience. Uphill? Yes. Worth it? Oh, yes!

I offer my witness that "because [the Savior] knows our potential perfectly, He will take us to places we never imagined ourselves."<sup>xx</sup>

I am confident He will take you to places you never imagined, and your service will be soul-stretching. Let God guide you to walk beside someone who needs you.<sup>xxi</sup>

You may find yourself teaching an adult woman to read. Or perhaps serving immigrant children. Maybe you will lead a community group keeping parks safe for families. When we let God prevail, He will take us just where He needs us and to places we never imagined.

President Nelson declared that "we receive more faith by doing something that requires more faith."<sup>xxii</sup>

I know that is true. Because in letting God prevail in my life, in letting Him author my story, my faith in Jesus Christ has increased.

How, then, will you let Him prevail?

What does that look like to a young woman who is pursuing an education and wants to marry and have a family? President Dallin H. Oaks has explained that the choice is not between family or education or career. He said: "Timing is what we have to choose... And we seek the inspiration of the Lord and the teachings of His servants in doing that."<sup>xxiii</sup>

In addressing this topic, I wish to be sensitive to those who have a sincere and abiding desire to marry and have children in this life, and who are single.

I recognize many sisters are parenting alone because of death or divorce.

I know of countless sisters who are married and desire children and are suffering with infertility and miscarriage.

Sisters, thank you for holding fast to your faith in Christ and walking your path with Him. I know you have made righteous choices and have righteous desires. I know you are suffering. You want the timing to change. This isn't the narrative you have written for yourself. My heart aches for you.

I pursued an education, both undergraduate and a law degree. I was married midway through my legal education. I had my first son the year after I passed the bar. I had babies, and my husband and I loved and nurtured them while we were both working. It was busy, sometimes hectic; we were stretched and sometimes tired. I supported him, and he supported me. Family was, and still is, our top priority. My husband and I sought inspiration in these choices and in the timing. It was what we felt impressed to do. We were trying to let Him prevail.

From a financial and professional perspective, it would have made sense to put off having children until I was more established in my career. But sisters, in letting Him author our stories we sometimes do things that the world cannot make sense of. I juggled pregnancy, birthing babies, nurturing children, carpool, little league, Church responsibilities, being a supportive spouse and my professional pursuits. It was a joyful juggle I wouldn't change. We felt confident in our course because we were letting God prevail.

Sisters, please don't misunderstand. I am not suggesting you should follow my course. Your story and my story are not the same. I share mine because it's what I know. What we share is our motivation: letting God prevail.

Being a mother is my highest priority. It is my ultimate joy. God blessed our first parents and commanded them to "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth."<sup>xxiv</sup> The first commandment given to Adam and Eve "pertained to their potential for parenthood."<sup>xxv</sup>

My primary identities are daughter of God, covenant woman, and disciple of Jesus Christ. And my primary orientation, that is, my focus, passion, and calling as a woman, is toward motherhood. That is our primary orientation, our sacred calling, as daughters of heavenly parents. The orientation and focus I feel toward motherhood is consistent with my diligent pursuit of an education.<sup>xxvi</sup> We are commanded to seek learning—some of which comes in our pursuit of education and much of it comes in our orientation, as daughters of God, toward motherhood—where we learn to become God-like as we cultivate attributes of love, compassion, and patience.

Letting God prevail does include inviting Him to be involved in the timing of our choices.

I am eternally grateful to have received inspiration from the Lord and direction from prophets to help us in the timing of our choice to invite children into our family when we did. I am oh so grateful I acted on the promptings and did not let worldly influences, convenience, honor, or money get in the way of the choice to fulfill my divine potential in bearing and rearing children.

If women cease to bear and nurture children, this mortal experience ends. It is vitally important, then, that women and men neither neglect nor dismiss the sacred responsibility of parenthood.

An abundance of social science data demonstrates the decisive, negative impact to nations and civilizations that stop having children. In many parts of the world, the average number of live births per woman is fewer than two. That means we are not replacing ourselves.

As leaders of the Church, we are concerned about recent trends in marriage and childbirth. In the United States, over the last 30 years, we have seen an eight to nine percentage point drop in those citizens who have ever been married. These figures "represent a worldwide problem."<sup>xxvii</sup> When people do not marry, fewer children are born.<sup>xxviii</sup>

The United States recently crossed a threshold where, of adults aged 18 to 55, there is now a greater share of single adults with no children than there are married adults with children.<sup>xxix</sup>

Children are vital to maintaining civilization. They are vital to the glorious plan of happiness. The commandment for us to multiply and replenish the earth “remains in force.”<sup>xxx</sup>

My dear sisters, I know the sincere desire of your hearts may be to marry and bear children, yet many of you are single, or suffering with infertility.

My fondest friend who has never married and had children of her own, has loved and cared for mine. It is not a substitute for children of her own. It is evidence that her orientation remains toward motherhood.

My son and daughter-in-law are presently working through the challenge of repeated miscarriages. Their desire is righteous. They are seeking to let God prevail in their lives, and for now another full-term pregnancy has eluded them. Remember, when we ask in faith to let Jesus Christ be the author and finisher of our story, we must be prepared to play out an uncomfortable narrative, in the hope of one that is, while painful, ultimately grander and more celestial than we can imagine.

Among my dear friends is a childless couple who married later in life and suffered with infertility. They asked in faith whether they should adopt children. They were willing to accept the answer, even though the narrative they had written for themselves included a miraculous birth. Rather than a baby, they felt impressed to adopt four sisters—ages five to seventeen. Absolutely, positively, not the narrative they had written for themselves. But oh, how magnificent a story He has penned with them.

President Nelson has taught: “To help another human being reach one’s celestial potential is part of the divine mission of woman. As mother, teacher, or nurturing saint, she molds living clay to the shape of her hopes. In partnership with God, her divine mission is to help spirits live and souls be lifted. This is the measure of her creation. It is ennobling, edifying and exalting.”<sup>xxxii</sup>

Whatever our personal circumstances, we are all part of the family of God, members of an earthly family, and preparing to be eternal parents. The blessings of exaltation made available to us through the Savior, Jesus Christ, include posterity. And so, whether we are sealed and bear children in this life, or the next, our object is exaltation—which can be ours if we make and keep covenants. When we enter a covenant relationship with God, we are bound vertically to Him, and we are never alone.<sup>xxxiii</sup> We are blessed with “an extra measure of [His] love and mercy.”<sup>xxxiii</sup>

President Nelson has taught that “making a covenant with God changes our relationship with Him forever. It blesses us with an extra measure of love and mercy. It affects who we are and how God will help us become what we can become.

“Those who make sacred covenants and keep them are promised eternal life and exaltation, ‘the greatest of all the gifts of God.’ Jesus Christ is the guarantor of those covenants. Covenant keepers who love God and allow Him to prevail over all other things in their lives make Him the most powerful influence in their lives.”<sup>xxxiv</sup>



As covenant women, we plan and prepare for marriage and the bearing of and nurture of children. What a sacred and holy calling! We love and lead and minister and mother to show our love for God and His children—because we want Him to prevail in our lives.

Friends, it is a glorious time to be a woman, a covenant woman, in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Understanding our role, purpose, and responsibility in the plan of happiness is ennobling, reassuring and joyful. Knowing that we have a living prophet preparing us for what lies ahead brings me peace and even optimism amid uncertainty. My covenant relationship with God gives me confidence. My covenant confidence is in Jesus Christ. <sup>xxxv</sup>

I testify that He lives, that His love for us is manifest in His willingness to offer His life and Atonement for each of us. He is the author and finisher of my faith, and of my story. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

- 
- <sup>i</sup> Camille N. Johnson, “Invite Christ to Author Your Story,” Liahona, Nov. 2021.
- <sup>ii</sup> See Alma 32:27-42.
- <sup>iii</sup> Camille N. Johnson, “Invite Christ to Author Your Story,” Liahona, Nov. 2021.
- <sup>iv</sup> Russell M. Nelson, “The Influence of Women,” 2024 Worldwide Relief Society Devotional.
- <sup>v</sup> Camille N. Johnson, “Invite Christ to Author Your Story,” Liahona, Nov. 2021.
- <sup>vi</sup> Russell M. Nelson, “Let God Prevail,” Liahona Nov. 2020.
- <sup>vii</sup> Moses 4:26.
- <sup>viii</sup> Russell M. Nelson, “Constancy amid Change,” Ensign, Nov. 1993.
- <sup>ix</sup> Russell M. Nelson, “Sisters’ Participation in the Gathering of Israel,” Liahona, Nov. 2018.
- <sup>x</sup> Camille N. Johnson, “Invite Christ to Author Your Story,” Liahona, Nov. 2021.
- <sup>xi</sup> Moses 5:11.
- <sup>xii</sup> Russell M. Nelson, “Woman – Of Infinite Worth,” Ensign, Nov. 1989.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Luke 1:38.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Russell M. Nelson, “A Plea to My Sisters,” Liahona, Nov. 2015.
- <sup>xv</sup> Russell M. Nelson, “The Influence of Women,” 2024 Worldwide Relief Society Devotional.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Russell M. Nelson, “The Influence of Women,” 2024 Worldwide Relief Society Devotional.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Russell M. Nelson, “The Influence of Women,” 2024 Worldwide Relief Society Devotional.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Camille N. Johnson, “Invite Christ to Author Your Story,” Liahona, Nov. 2021.
- <sup>xix</sup> Camille N. Johnson, “Invite Christ to Author Your Story,” Liahona, Nov. 2021.
- <sup>xx</sup> Camille N. Johnson, “Invite Christ to Author Your Story,” Liahona, Nov. 2021.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Russell M. Nelson, “The Influence of Women,” 2024 Worldwide Relief Society Devotional.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Russell M. Nelson, “Faith in Him Will Move Mountains,” Liahona, May 2021.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Dallin H. Oaks, Face to Face, Worldwide Young Single Adult Event with Elder Dallin H. Oaks and Elder Russell M. Ballard, Nov. 19, 2017.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Genesis 1:28.
- <sup>xxv</sup> “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Gospel Library.”
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Dallin H. Oaks, “Women and Education,” Ensign, Mar. 1975.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Dallin H. Oaks, “Stand for Truth,” Worldwide Devotional for Young Adults, May 2023.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Dallin H. Oaks, “Stand for Truth,” Worldwide Devotional for Young Adults, May 2023.
- <sup>xxix</sup> See Chris Bullivant and Brad Wilcox, “Back from the brink: The intellectual tide is turning on marriage and civil society,” Deseret News Apr. 17, 2024, citing Current Population Survey (IPUMS).
- <sup>xxx</sup> “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.”
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Russell M. Nelson, “Woman – Of Infinite Worth,” Ensign, Nov. 1989.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Russell M. Nelson, “The Everlasting Covenant,” Liahona, Oct. 2022.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Russell M. Nelson, “The Everlasting Covenant,” Liahona, Oct. 2022.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Russell M. Nelson, “The Everlasting Covenant,” Liahona, Oct. 2022.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Ulisses Soares, “Covenant Confidence through Jesus Christ,” Liahona, May 2024.