

“The Vital Role of Women in the Gospel”

Linda K. Burton, Relief Society general president
Carole M. Stephens, first counselor
Linda S. Reeves, second counselor

This address was given Thursday, April 26, 2012 at the BYU Women’s Conference

© 2012 by Brigham Young University Women’s Conference. All rights reserved

For further information write:

BYU Women’s Conference

161 Harman Continuing Education Building

Provo, Utah 84602

801-422-7692

E-mail: womens_conference@byu.edu

Home page: <http://womensconference.byu.edu>

Sister Burton:

Welcome! I’m Linda Burton, this is my first counselor, Carole Stephens, and my second counselor, Linda Reeves. We’re delighted to be here today.

We’re hoping that as you leave this Women’s Conference today, and maybe even as you leave this session, that you’ll leave with something specific that the Holy Ghost will teach you. We hope you’ll see patterns that will help you throughout this conference. It’s interesting how the Holy Ghost weaves things together to teach us things we need to do, especially when they’re repetitive. We’re hoping that you go home with an increased desire to be better disciples of Jesus Christ and that you’ll understand that you have a vital role to play as women in the gospel.

In the years to come, we look forward to getting to know each of you, but in this setting, we’ll simply introduce ourselves. We’ve decided to do this collectively rather than individually. So here are a few facts about us. Collectively we’ve been married 113 years. Between us we have 25 children, 10 sons and 15 daughters. We have 61 grandchildren—28 grandsons and 33 granddaughters—you can see we’re tilting towards Relief Society, can’t you?

Sister Stephens:

Collectively we have lived in or visited 66 countries on six continents. We have served in Relief Society for a total of 43 years. And we have served for visiting teachers—are you ready for this?—for 115 years.

Sister Reeves:

We have served in Young Women for 20 years, in Primary for 23 years, and again collectively, in other Church callings including Sunday School for 33 years. And interestingly enough—I thought it was interesting that each of us has had an opportunity not only to serve in PTAs for many years, but we’ve all been politically active.

Sister Stephens:

Collectively, we’ve had many mortal experiences, either in our own individual homes, our immediate families, or in our extended families. Those have included unemployment, cancer, drug addiction, miscarriages, infertility, twins, death, divorce, adoptions, disability, financial loss, depression, alcoholism

and pornography. These experiences have strengthened our testimonies, and they have created opportunities for us to rely on and to be strengthened through the atoning power of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Sister Reeves:

Sister Zina Young, who is a former general Relief Society president, said, “Sisters, it is for us to be wide awake to our duties” (*Women’s Exponent*, Oct. 15, 1877). So today we’re going to talk a little bit about what we need to do to recognize our duties and to be wide awake to those.

Sister Burton:

Being wide awake comes in knowing that we all have a vital role to play in Heavenly Father’s kingdom. We may be in different circumstances –some of us are married, some of us are not; some of us are divorced, some of us are widowed. But we all have two things in common that we know for sure, and we can read this from Doctrine and Covenants section 138. I’ll just briefly paraphrase it. We know we received our first lessons in the world of spirits and we know we were prepared to come forth in this time to labor in His vineyard to do His work. As we discuss the vital work we were sent here to do, we’re going to try and pretend like we’re sitting around a kitchen table and that you’re peeking in our window so we won’t be so nervous here in the Marriott Center.

Sister Stephens:

The Lord defines his work in Moses chapter 1, verse 39—you probably all know this and could repeat it with me. “For behold, this is my work and my glory, to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.” When the Prophet Joseph restored Relief Society, he said this. In *Daughters in My Kingdom* [page 4] he’s quoted, “The [Relief Society] is not only to relieve the poor, but to save souls.” It is vital that each of us understand our responsibility and our duties. It’s vital that we understand our work and be prepared to participate and to take our place in His work. His work is called a work of salvation, and in the Church sometimes we use big broad terms like “a work of salvation,” and as soon as we say that, you say, “That is too hard. That is too big. I can’t do that.” But we hope to show you today that the work of salvation is really quite easy, and it’s something that we do every single day.

Sister Reeves:

Linda, I wonder if you would mind sharing with us the story that you talk about, about the fly.

Sister Burton:

As we talk about the vital role we have as women, the first thing we want to remember is that everything we do in the Church is to help us increase our faith in our Heavenly Father, and increase our personal righteousness. Our Relief Society purposes are the work of our Heavenly Father. I was in church one day and a darling sister whom I love came up to me-and said, “I would just love to be a fly on the wall and see what goes on behind doors in your house.” Frankly, it startled me, because I thought, what am I doing in church that she thinks may be different in my house? It was a good wakeup call for me to think, am I living the gospel in my home as well as I appear to be living it at Church? What about your mirror story?

Sister Reeves:

Well, I had a similar experience. I was fortunate to inherit my grandmother’s mirror, a mirror that she had hung in her entryway of her home, and so I put it in our entryway after she passed away. And one day I was passing that mirror and looked at my face, and I’d just been with my husband and children in the other room, and I thought, my face was so sour. I just thought, is that the face that my children and husband are seeing all day long in the home? And so that mirror has become a sweet reminder of paying attention to what expression is on my face, which of course, that expression is very reflective of what’s going on inside me.

Sister Stephens:

And Linda, I think you also shared with us a story about how you decided to change when you saw that look on your face in the mirror.

Sister Reeves:

Thank you. Many years ago now—you can see by my age that it's many years ago when I had just four young children, in fact our oldest was not quite five—and I had always looked forward to motherhood and loved those little children. But I was overwhelmed. My house was almost always a mess, and often the children were not dressed until noon. And if they had been fed at all, it was because they'd gone on into the kitchen and gotten cold cereal. But I realized I was not enjoying motherhood, mainly because I didn't like the mother that I was. I was having a hard time maintaining control and being happy, and accomplishing all that I felt like I needed to do. And I really found myself with a desperate feeling. And I wasn't alone in this—my husband too. We were both overwhelmed. And so we determined that we would spend time over the next little while in fervent prayer to our Heavenly Father that our scripture study would be with that end in mind, of finding out what the Lord would have us do so that we could get things under control. We went to the temple and we pled with the Lord over a period of months. And the answer that came was really so simple, and what we hear all the time. In fact, I've been so touched by those that have spoken before us today, seeing that the revelation that comes from our Heavenly Father is truly the same for all of us, what our prophets, seers and revelators have told us. What came to me and to my husband was that every day, we needed to have our personal prayers and prayer with our children. Every day we needed to read the scriptures, individually, and also with our children. Each Monday night—you know the answer to that one—family home evening. And that we should try to get to the temple as often as we could, even with those four little children.

Now does this mean that nothing else was important? Certainly there are other important things—service is so important. But the Lord was telling us, prioritize. Concentrate on those four things. Do those all-important things every day, and everything else that's important will fall into place. I've even had women who knew me well, years later who said, "Oh Linda, I remember coming to your home and ringing the doorbell and one of the children would come in the door, and if they had any clothes on at all it was just underwear." And when they've told me that, the thoughts come into my mind, "Yes, but did you know that we had prayer and read scriptures that day?" And you know, when I say that things have been easy, believe me, they haven't. It's been a hard road, and we've had some good adversity. But the confidence before the Lord, and the sweetness that has come into our lives as I've seen our children come to know the Savior, to really know who He is, and to know of His Atonement, because we tried to be in the scriptures, and we were praying, and now that they're all grown up, our two youngest are on missions and they're sort of all out of the home—we still have our dear daughter and son-in-law and three children living with us now—but as I look over and watch them and see that they're trying to do the same things that we did, there is so much peace and happiness in my life.

Sister Burton:

You heard those vital things that needed to happen. Those are the things that count.

Sister Stephens:

Thanks for sharing that with us. I think every one of us in this room, has had that same moment in our lives when we had that awakening, that change of heart when the Spirit was speaking to us and telling us that something needed to change. And that was the Spirit prompting us to act, and you acted on that. And then when we take a step back and we refocus a little bit, we realize that what we had stepped away from were the most essential things. I had a little granddaughter who taught me a very important lesson about staying focused on the Savior. We had some grandchildren visiting from Arizona, and our little

granddaughter Mailee and her little brothers were helping me to set up some decorations for Christmas. I had set up previously a little Nativity, and I noticed as we were doing some other things that Mailee went over and she was rearranging it. My first thought was, I'll just fix it when she leaves. So I just let her play with it, and after she left, and I finished up with the Christmas decorations, I went back into the family room and thought, oh, I should fix that Nativity. I walked over and look down at the Nativity and I didn't need to fix it at all. I just started to cry as I looked down and I saw that little Mailee had put the manger in the center, and she had all the little animals tucked in tight around that manger, and they were peeking in. Then around the animals she had all of the people. And everybody was focused, center. They were all facing the Savior. I have that little Nativity in my office, and I look at it often, and it reminds me where my focus needs to be in everything that I do.

In Matthew chapter 14 we also learn a great lesson from Peter about focus. You know the story, when the Savior came and was walking on the water, and the disciples looked out and they were afraid—they thought it was a spirit. And the Savior said to them, “Be of good cheer; it is I. Be not afraid. And Peter answered ... and said, “Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And He said [well, come], Come.” And so Peter did. He got out of the boat, and he started to walk towards the Savior, and he was walking on the water. But then, you know the story, he lost his focus, didn't he? Took his eyes off the Savior, because it says, and when “he saw the wind boisterous, [and] he was afraid.” So the winds and the waves were coming up around him and he saw them instead of the Savior. He lost his focus. And when he saw that, and he became afraid—he was filled with fear—it says he was beginning to sink. That's one of my favorite words—“beginning” to sink. He was not sunk. All of us at some point in our lives are beginning to sink. Every day of our lives we might be sinking a little bit. And some days we might feel like we're just a nose above water. But we are never sunk if we bring our focus back to center. The center of our lives is our Savior, Jesus Christ.

We also learn a great lesson in John chapter 4, about the woman at the well—that's what we've come to know her as. This is such a wonderful story with so many layers, and so many teachings in this story. But for today, we'll talk about the ways that we can liken her to ourselves. First of all, we know that this woman was less than perfect. Linda, I think you wanted to share something about that part.

Sister Reeves:

I would. Isn't it amazing, when you think about the fact that the Savior, who was worn out, went to this particular well, among the Samaritans, and Heavenly Father guided Him to this woman, that we're going to find out about, has, maybe we'd say, has made some mistakes in her life. Many mistakes. And yet because of Heavenly Father's love, He sent the Savior, all by himself, to this particular woman, to offer her this living water.

Sister Stephens:

Well, we read in the scriptures that the Savior started to teach her. And she didn't understand at first. Sometimes when we open the scriptures, we have a hard time understanding them too. But the Savior didn't give up on her. He continued to teach. And that's another lesson for us. Don't give up on the scriptures. If you immerse yourself in the scriptures, pretty soon they'll start to talk to you. So don't give up on yourselves, keep trying. Secondly, He did not judge her. He knew who she was. He questioned her about her life. He knew that she had had five husbands, and the man that she was with now was not her husband. He knew all of that but He did not judge her. He continued to teach her, and it worked. She felt His love, and she started to understand what He was trying to say to her. And when she had the faith to ask Him, He filled her with living water, the living water that only He can give. And then when she was filled, she exercised her faith, and she went out and shared with others. Sometimes we get to the part where she's received the living water and that's the end of the story. But if you read further, the Savior's talking about “the field is white, already to harvest,” and the woman has gone before Him. She has gone

into the city to testify, and to share this living water with others. She says to them, “Come and see. Come and see a man.” And as she planted these seeds, she prepared the ground so that when the Savior and His disciples came later, they were able to teach. And in verse 42 it says, “And [they] said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.”

To many people this woman was insignificant. In the first verse, it says, she even questions, why are you asking me, a Samaritan, for a drink of water? You know that the Jews have nothing to do with Samaritans. And the disciples question when they came back—they marveled that He even talked to her. So to some she may have seemed insignificant, but not to the Savior. He knew her. He knew her potential, and He needed her to participate in His work, and He filled her with that living water, knowing that when she was filled, she would go out and share with others.

Sister Burton:

I think there’s an interesting little footnote to this story. In verse 28 we read that the woman left her water pot and went to testify. She thought she had come to get just water. But what she left with was so much more—it was really the vital, living water that she left with, which enabled her to go out and serve. How do we get that? ~~What’s the how of that? It sounds great, but~~ What do we do to get that living water?

Sister Belle Spafford, one of our wonderful Relief Society general presidents, gives this suggestion. She says, “The average woman today, I believe, would do well to appraise her interests, evaluate the activities in which she is engaged, and then take steps to simplify her life, putting things of first importance first, placing emphasis where the rewards will be [the] greatest, and [the] most enduring, and ridding herself of the less rewarding activities” (*Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society*, xiii). That’s the how.

Sister Reeves:

I have a comment on the fact that she left that pitcher of water, the pitcher itself, yes, the vessel, thank you, and when I think about that, it makes me think that when we turn toward the Savior and follow Him, we must leave the world behind, and those things that are unimportant.

Sister Stephens:

And we know that one of our purposes in Relief Society is to strengthen families and homes. And when we as mothers, and grandmothers and sisters and aunts and daughters are focused on the Savior, we can share and strengthen our children and grandchildren.

Sister Burton:

That’s the most vital thing that we do—one of the most vital things.

Sister Stephens:

Absolutely. absolutely. It makes us more intentional parents, I think, when we keep eternal life in the perspective, when keep the Lord—the Lord’s “for this is my work and glory”—when we’re focused on that, it makes us more intentional. Our little granddaughter Halle—our daughter Melanie sent us a picture, or texted us a picture right after general conference on Sunday. Halle is six years old, and she was watching general conference with a notebook and a pencil. And she was coloring pictures, or drawing pictures, and writing down the things that she learned from listening to general conference. Now I would guess that a six-year-old Halle, did not come up with the idea to have a tablet and a pencil, and be watching conference and drawing pictures and making notes about the speakers. Halle gets it because her mother gets it. And because Melanie is keeping her vessel filled, she is able to bless her family. Melanie is teaching Halle vital things, and you can see—I think the picture is up there—you can see, Halle got it. She

was talking about temporal and spiritual needs. And then she says, “We are strong girls.” Don’t you love that? She gets it. She’s six years old and she knows she is a strong “girl” with a purpose.

Sister Burton:

It’s all about intentional parenting, isn’t it? What’s one way we can do that? Linda, how can we help?

Sister Reeves:

Well I’m reminded of a few years ago when now-Bishop [Gary E.] Stevenson of the Presiding Bishopric told or suggested to us in general conference that we take a virtual tour of our homes. You probably remember that. He suggested that we close our eyes and imagine going in through the front door. What do we see on our walls? What magazines and books are there? Is there a place in the home that’s set aside for scripture study, where maybe the scriptures are in a bookcase there, readily accessible for us to use. What kind of feeling is there in the home? What kind of conversations go on? Is there contention? All of these things. It reminds me of how later on in his talk, he tells us to say the word “temple.” “Temple.” And then “holy temple.” “Home.” “Holy home.” That is what we’re trying to create, isn’t it, sisters? A place that is a refuge from the storm for our families, for our parents, our brothers and sisters, whoever comes there, friends. I had the experience when we moved to Utah about 15 years ago, and my children were beginning to get to know children at school, my twins were invited over to play to one of the homes, and I didn’t know this mother at all. And they were very insistent, they wanted to go. So I thought, well, I’ll just take them over there and I’ll go into the home and meet this mother. And as soon as the mother opened the door, right there, in the entryway, was this beautiful painting of the Savior. And I could feel the feeling in that home immediately and felt great about those girls going in.

Sister Burton:

That’s intentional parenting again, isn’t it? We can compare this principle of being intentional with the story of Lehonti. If we are not in tune with the Spirit and intentional in our parenting, we can come down by degrees if we’re not careful. I remember Sister Elaine Dalton talking about that. She said, “Could it be that we tolerate, then accept, then embrace the vice that surrounds us?” We have to be so careful. We have to see where the chinks in our armor are. I loved Sister Todd’s, example this morning of going shopping with her daughters to get swimming suits. She was like a warrior. She did not come down—unlike Lehonti, who did come down, by degrees. It’s interesting as you look at the story of Lehonti in Alma chapter 47, there is are a couple of phases that show the process of his “coming down.” At first it says he “durst not”—in other words, he didn’t dare come down. Then it said he “would not.” And then Amalickiah *could* not get him to come down until he says, “OK, you can bring your guards with you.” Sometimes we feel a little more secure if our friends come with us, then we can more easily “come down.” But it works the other way too—I think as Relief Society sisters, if we’re holding on ~~together~~ and bracing each other up, we can stay on the strait and narrow path together and make a positive difference for good in each others’ lives.

I’m thinking of a wonderful mother that saw some concerns in her home with her oldest daughter, who was just starting junior high. She could see her beginning to “come down.” When she got to the bottom of it, she found that this girl was associating with some friends who were bringing her down, ridiculing her standards. This was a wise mom, a guardian of her home and she was taking a “virtual tour” just as Sister Reeves talked about earlier. She decided that she’d better pray. Because her spiritual vessel was full with the living water, when she prayed, the answer that came to her was, “Take her to the temple.” So she arranged to start taking this daughter every Friday morning to the temple. Soon they branched out and started inviting other mothers and their daughters in their ward to go with them to the temple. You can imagine what the result of this story is—the daughter was strengthened, the mother was strengthened, and friendships were formed with girls who did not bring her down. But it all began with a virtual tour and

intentional parenting, to strengthen a daughter, a home and family. That's a vital role, women—that's the vital role we play in the gospel.

Sister Reeves:

I love that she was so prayerful in asking Heavenly Father to guide and direct her with the very specific thing that would help her daughter.

Sister Burton:

Isn't that interesting how it keeps going back to the temple and prayer and scriptures and so on? It's not always a mother that wields the influence for good. Sometimes it's a friend—and I will tell this one. This is my story. At age 13 I was struggling a little bit, and Heavenly Father brought a young single adult woman into my life. She was serving as a missionary at the time. She happened to see that this little 13-year-old girl was very insecure and needed some shoring up. I remember kneeling with her in prayer, and her praying for me. That was something I will never forget—it was life-changing for me. I knew that she loved me and I knew she knew her Heavenly Father. She wielded great influence on my life at a critical time and I am thankful forever for her.

Sister Reeves:

Do you mind if I share a quote from President Packer? There is such a great promise that he gave. He said, "I say again that [we] today are ... in enemy territory with a declining standard of morality. ... As a servant of the Lord, I promise you that you will be protected and shielded from the attacks of the adversary if you will heed the promptings that come from the Holy Spirit. Dress modestly; talk reverently; listen to uplifting music. Avoid all immorality and personally degrading practices. Take hold of your life and order yourself to be valiant" ("Counsel to Youth," *Ensign*, Nov. 2011). Don't you love that? Order yourself to be valiant. We can do it.

Sister Burton:

That reminds me of the scripture in 2 Nephi 25:26. There's no more intentional parenting than this, and nothing that will strengthen your home more. You'll remember this scripture. "And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins," which of course is the Atonement of our Savior Jesus Christ. Can I tell one more story?

Sister Reeves:

Please, we love stories!

Sister Burton:

This is one last intentional parenting story. I saw this happen just a couple years ago in a land far away. I saw a little 10-year-old girl stand up in fast and testimony meeting, and she said, "My mom and my dad had this crazy idea to send us to these schools, and we don't even know the language. It's been really kind of hard." She continued, "But my mom has taught us some scriptures to memorize each day in our little family devotional. And it sure helps me when times are getting tough." She went on to say, "In fact my favorite one comes from 2 Timothy, chapter 1, verse 7," and she rattled it off: "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." What a great example of intentional parenting and the importance of strengthening a home. Her mother was filling her vital role in the lives of her family.

Sister Reeves:

I would love to relate about Alma's experience. Alma Senior, who had of course learned all that he knew about the gospel from Abinadi, and then he was able to gather many of the people out with him—they had

to hide out. And we read the beautiful story about the people gathered at the waters of Mormon, where Alma talks about bearing one another's burdens, and mourning and comforting one another—that these are the covenants that we make at the time of baptism. And how beautiful and important those covenants are. Let me read maybe a verse or two here. “And it came to pass”—this is in Mosiah 18, verse 8—“And it came to pass that he said unto them: Behold, here are the waters of Mormon (for thus were they called) and now, as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people[—*His* people—], and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light; yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God ... in all places that ye may be in, even until death”—what incredible covenants that we are making to take care of one another!

Sister Burton:

That's right.

Sister Reeves:

I know you mentioned once about how much you love the feeling that—what they did.

Sister Burton:

Covenants are what sustain us—that's our armor we've talked about, but what I love is the verse that comes next after the one you've just shared. It says, “And now when the people had heard these words, they clapped their hands for joy, and exclaimed: This is the desire of our hearts” (Mosiah 18:11).

Sometimes I think we allow our covenants to drag us down. But they should make us joyful. We need to cleave to those covenants with joy in our hearts. I love that they clapped their hands for joy, for those covenants.

Sister Reeves:

And then as they remembered their covenants, I love turning to the next page and verse 21: “And he commanded them that there should be no contention one with another, but that they should look forward with one eye, having one faith and one baptism, having their hearts knit together in unity and in love one towards another.”

And as we continue to read, we find that they gave, in verse 28, “And thus they should impart of their substance of their own free will and good desires toward God, and to those priests that stood in need, yea, and to every needy, naked soul.” Is that interesting that they mention priests there? Sometimes I don't ever think about maybe that the bishop or the stake president has needs. We kind of expect or think that they're serving all of us.

Sister Burton:

That's right. It goes back to the story of the woman at the well. Unless our vessels are full, we can't share that water with someone else. We've got to have that vital water inside us to be able to do that.

Sister Stephens:

These things that we've talked about, that I've heard you talk about and read from the scriptures, they are all things that come naturally to us. Joseph Smith said, “You are now placed in a situation where you can act according to those sympathies which God has planted in your bosoms. If you live up to these principles, how great and glorious!” (*Daughters in My Kingdom*, p. 16).

So being spiritually prepared allows us to be willing and able and worthy vessels for the Lord to use to take care of these things that need to be taken care of every single day. Elder Ballard, I love, calls them

“small but deliberate deeds” (M. Russell Ballard, quoting Spencer W. Kimball, “Finding Joy through Loving Service,” *Ensign*, May 2011), and they’re deliberate because we’re praying and asking, “What can I do?” And Heavenly Father, if He knows that we’re willing and worthy, He will use us.

In 3 Nephi 17, beginning in verse 7, He says this, “Have ye any that are sick among you? Bring them. Bring them hither. Have ye any that are lame, or blind, or halt, or maimed, or leprous, or that are withered, or that are deaf, or that are afflicted in any manner? Bring them hither and I will heal them.” He needs us. He needs us to bring them to Him.

We talked about the work of salvation earlier. The work of salvation is temporal. The work of salvation is also spiritual. But we don’t need an official mission call to go out and serve and “bring them” to Him. Those who are in need are right next door. They are right across the street. They are right around the corner. He knows who they are. Sometimes we say they’re lost. Well they are not lost to Him. He knows right where they are, and He will use us to go out and bring them to Him if we are willing and if we are prepared.

Sister Burton:

Elder Ballard said, “Every sister in this Church who has made covenants with the Lord has a divine mandate to help save souls, to lead the women of the world, to strengthen the homes of Zion, and to build the kingdom of God” (“Women of Righteousness,” *Ensign*, April 2002). So We have a divine mandate to do that. You have a story to share about visiting teaching that will illustrate this really well.

Sister Reeves:

I would love to share that. I received a letter recently that was written to a former missionary who’s been home for 30 years, and he received this letter.

“Dear Elder Jensen [he’s not really Elder Jensen, but this is the true letter and story], a very loving greetings from our area of the world. I hope you remember who I am and also remember my husband and children. Thirty years ago you taught the gospel to us. We were active in the Church for several years, but then because of too much pride, we stopped going to church 25 years ago. About nine months ago I received a call from a sister who said she had just moved into our ward, and that I didn’t know her but that she was my new visiting teacher and wanted to come visit me. I told her I did not go to that church anymore. She said that was OK, she still wanted to come over and visit me and get to know me anyway. Well, she came over, and I remember that first visit. I asked her—she looked so young—I asked her how old she was, and she was 24. I thought, how can a 24-year-old teach me anything? She was very kind and bore a strong testimony about the Book of Mormon. I thought that she would visit me just this once, but I was wrong. It was the first of many visits. She bore a very strong testimony that Jesus loved me and that I was needed in the ward. Nearly six weeks ago, my mother died. The first person to arrive at my home was my visiting teacher. She spent the day with me. She asked me if I had a Book of Mormon that she could use. Then she read to me some very comforting scriptures about the plan of salvation and gave her testimony that I would see my mother again. The Spirit was very strong. I felt that the Lord loved me because my visiting teacher loves me. I want you to know that we are going to church again. I want to thank you for being a missionary. And I am so grateful for this young, 24-year-old woman, who I didn’t think knew anything, who has touched my heart. Our three children are now grown, and we hope that they will return to the Church as well, for we are preparing to go to the temple. With much love,” this sister.

Sister Stephens:

Right next door. Right around the corner.

Sister Burton:

Yes, we do it every day.

Sister Stephens:

Bring them—it's a natural thing for us.

Sister Burton:

We bring them so that they can be healed through the Atonement, and the Atonement covers much more than sin. What else does it do? Why do we need to bring them? What does the Atonement do for people?

Sister Reeves:

Well, the sorrows that we feel ...

Sister Stephens:

Disappointments and loss and ...

Sister Burton:

Strengthens, reconciles, it enables us, doesn't it? We've got to bring them to Him, and they're everywhere. Let's close with our testimonies, should we? Do you want to go first with your testimony, Sister Reeves?

Sister Reeves:

I would love to. Thank you. Dear sisters, what a sweet thing this has been. I hope you can tell how much we love each other. It was instant. I did not know these two darling, wonderful sisters, and when we first met for the first time, the three of us together, in the bathroom, we were having to dress for photos, of all things ...

Sister Stephens:

We were hiding from everyone!

Sister Reeves:

... it truly—the feeling came over me that we had worked together before. And I have to say that every time I walk into that Relief Society building I still expect an alarm to go off and a couple of men to come and take me by the arm and carry me out and say, "What are you doing in here?" And I will say, "I don't know."

But I am so grateful to my Father in Heaven for this opportunity to serve. As you came in today, as I looked out—I had said to myself, OK, I'm not going to be nervous. I'm going to imagine them all as beautiful colored dots and not think about the fact that they are truly people. But as I looked into your faces, I realized how much love that the Lord has put into my heart for the sisters all over the world, not just sisters of the Church but sisters all over the world—those that aren't yet members of the Church. I want you to know that I love my Savior. I know that He lives. I know that He stands at the head of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I am so grateful to be able to daily repent of my sins, and to become clean again through His atoning sacrifice. I love the Prophet Joseph Smith. I love the Book of Mormon. I am so grateful to live at a time on the earth when we have living prophets, our dear prophet, President Monson, whom I love. And I say these things in the name of our beloved Savior, Jesus Christ, amen.

Sister Stephens:

Like Linda, when I walked in, and I do this often when I'm asked to give a talk, I will look into the audience, and look into the eyes of the sisters and the brothers, and I ask Heavenly Father to help me to

feel His love for you. And as I am filled with that love, I also pray that He will help you to feel of His love through me. I'm sure you can't imagine it, but I feel a great deal of peace sitting here in front of you because I feel such a great love, the great love that our Heavenly Father has for you and that I have for you. One of the blessings of this calling, I think, is being able to receive and know an extra portion of the love Heavenly Father has for His daughters. I know that I am a daughter of Heavenly Father, who loves me. That makes all the difference. I know that He has a work for me to do. He has a work for each one of us to do. He loves us so much, He wants us to come back and be with Him again some day, and He's prepared a way for us to be able to do that, through His perfect plan. I am so thankful for a Savior who makes it all possible. I am weak and simple—I confess that to each one of you—but I also have faith that's increasing every day, and I love my Savior, and know that in and through and because of Him, I can do what I've been asked to do. I'm so thankful for a prophet—for prophets, seers and revelators who are the watchmen on the tower, who see the way ahead and can protect us and guide us if we will just listen to them. I'm so grateful for them, thankful for the restoration of the gospel, for the Prophet Joseph Smith. I know the Book of Mormon is the word of God. It is another testament of Jesus Christ. I'm so thankful to know these things and to be able to bear testimony of them this day. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Sister Burton:

Sisters, we mentioned at the beginning, that our hope for you is that you go home with something specific that you have felt in your hearts. We hope that the Spirit you have felt has filled your spiritual vessel so that you can go home and strengthen your own families, and strengthen those that you live next door to, those that you visiting teach, anyone who comes within your sphere of influence. As we speak of our Relief Society purposes, to increase our faith, to strengthen families, and seek out to help others, we speak with one voice, sisters. That's our united voice that helps us to be vital women in the gospel. Our influence for good will be incalculable as we do these things.

We talked about bringing others to Jesus Christ so that His Atonement can heal them. I want to share one statement from Elder Holland's general conference talk that gives me hope because of the Atonement. He said, "However late you think you are, however many chances you think you have missed, however many mistakes you feel you have made or talents you think you don't have, or however far from home and family and God you feel you have traveled, I testify that you have *not* traveled beyond the reach of divine love. It is not possible for you to sink lower than the infinite light of Christ's Atonement shines" ("The Laborers in the Vineyard," *Ensign*, May 2012).

I hope each of us believes that in our hearts because it is true. I testify our Father in Heaven lives and loves us. He knows us individually and perfectly, and by name. The greatest evidence of His love is that He sent His Son Jesus Christ. His Atonement covers everything that is unfair in this life. I testify of Him. I love Him. I thank Him for what He has done for me. I thank you for who you are. And I pray fervently that the Lord will bless each of you. Thank you for your love, for your prayers. We need them desperately, as you can only imagine. May Heavenly Father bless you and strengthen your homes and your families and all those you love. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.