

## **Sister to Sister Conversation**

Sister Reyna I. Aburto, second counselor, Relief Society general presidency  
Sister Rebecca Craven, second counselor, Young Women general presidency  
Sister Lisa L. Harkness, first counselor, Primary general presidency  
Sister Tracy Browning, member, Relief Society general board

This address was given Friday, May 1, 2020 at the BYU Women's Conference  
© 2020 by Brigham Young University Women's Conference  
All rights reserved.

---

For further information, write:  
BYU Women's Conference  
253 Harman Continuing Education Building  
Provo, Utah 84602  
801-422-7692  
Email: [womens\\_conference@byu.edu](mailto:womens_conference@byu.edu)  
Website: [womensconference.byu.edu](http://womensconference.byu.edu)

---

**Sister Tracy Browning:** Welcome to the Sister to Sister Conversation as part of BYU's Women's Conference. I'm Tracy Browning of the Relief Society general board, and I'll be your moderator for today's discussion. I'm coming to you from my makeshift home studio in my basement, albeit, a little less casually dressed than I have been for several weeks. Today I'll be asking questions to our panelists that women have submitted over the last few months.

I am so excited to introduce our first panelist, Sister Reyna Aburto, second counselor in the Relief Society general presidency, who is in an isolated studio in Provo, Utah. Let me introduce you to our next panelist, Sister Rebecca Craven, second counselor in the Young Women general presidency, who is joining us from her home in Utah. And finally, Sister Lisa Harkness, first counselor in the Primary general presidency, who is also joining us from her home in Utah.

Sister Aburto, Sister Craven, Sister Harkness and I welcome you to this unique Sister to Sister event, held completely online! We wish we could meet with you in person at the Marriott Center on the Brigham Young University campus, but instead we're sending you virtual hugs and lots of love. We're grateful to you sisters for joining us to view this conversation and to our sisters participating in today's discussion. We so look forward to what you're going to teach us today.

I want to start with this question, because we're all in a similar situation. Most of us are sheltering in place at home, and with that comes some unique challenges and opportunities. For me, I am never really quite sure what day of the week it is. Sisters, let me ask you: What have you been doing since you've been spending more time at home? Sister Craven:

**Sister Becky Craven:** Well, actually, not a lot has changed in really any of our schedules, we're just doing things from home like we're doing today. We sure hope that even though we aren't physically together with you, that you can feel how much we love you. But one thing that I enjoy is growing potted lemon trees. So one of the fun things about being at home at this time is that I've been able to spend more time tending my trees and watching my lemons grow. But the other thing that I've been watching grow is my hair. So, so far I have missed two hair appointments, and I think probably, if you look carefully, you can even see my "sparkles" growing out too.

**Sister Browning:** I think we can all relate to missing our hairdressers during this time. Sister Harkness, what have you been doing with your time?

**Sister Lisa L. Harkness:** Well, I've been doing a lot more cooking than I usually do. I love, love food. And I've rediscovered snacking in a whole new way during this time at home. Just recently I saw a funny meme that I can really relate to. It said something about that now it's suggested that we all wear masks in our homes, not to prevent us from catching a virus, but to prevent us from excessive snacking. Well, I think it's time for me to find a really good mask to prevent me from excessive home snacking.

**Sister Browning:** Really wise counsel, thank you. Sister Aburto, how about you?

**Sister Reyna I. Aburto:** Well, what I have noticed lately is that my family and me, we are spending so much time with our dog now, that she's getting so spoiled. So I'm thinking about setting some, you know, social distancing guidelines with her because this is going too far.

But on a more serious note, I'm really impressed and amazed to see how the Lord's work continues on the earth, and how each of us can still participate in it. I want to tell everyone who is listening to us today that we are here as four members of Relief Society having a conversation. Our intent is not to address all the questions we have received. We don't pretend to have all the answers either. Like all of you, we also have our struggles, our longings, our wounds. We are all in need of peace, solace and healing from our Savior. So, some questions are probably too personal and specific to answer in a setting like this. But please be assured that we have read all of them, and that we will continue to read them. And we will have them in our heart as we continue serving in our calling and in the councils of the church where we participate.

Our prayer as we have this conversation is that we can all get closer to our Heavenly Father, and also get closer to our Savior so we can hear Him, so we can hear His voice; so we can also get closer to each other, as Latter-day Saints, as women in Zion, as covenant women, as women of faith; so we can work together in gathering Israel, and in preparing the earth for the Second Coming. I would like to ask each of you to please listen to the promptings you will get and take note of what the spirit will tell you, specifically, as we counsel together. Please listen to the principles, listen to the doctrine, as we gather all safely in Christ today, and as we gather together in one, all things in Christ, our Savior and Redeemer.

**Sister Browning:** Thank you for that inspired counsel, Sister Aburto.

So sisters, to kick off our discussion, a topic that we heard a lot from our sisters was around emotional health. Many of us, as you're aware, are struggling in our current situation because our healthy social and emotional connections are less available to us right now. This can be compounded by the fact that some of us may already struggle with feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and despair. What would you say to those of us who face depression, anxiety, or who struggle with those feelings? Sister Harkness:

**Sister Harkness:** Well, these are really very real concerns. And whether we struggle ourselves or know someone close to us that does, what we are learning is that this is a shared experience for so many. But isn't it wonderful that we are living in a day when we can talk more openly about our feelings, so we can help bear one another's burdens without judgment or confusion.

Right here now I'm thinking about Alma's teaching to his people, and I think it applies so well to these concerns. He taught that "Christ would go forth, suffering pains, afflictions, temptations and infirmities of every kind." This helps us know our Heavenly Father is keenly aware of every difficulty we experience, including these emotional struggles and afflictions. Sisters, we can have faith that there will be healing. There is hope for us all because Christ has condescended below all things so He may know how to succor us, His people, in every kind of infirmity.

Now while our emotional struggles may make our mortal experience very, very difficult at times, our struggles do not define our potential as children of God. When we return to His presence, we will be whole, fully capable, and free from our present mortal afflictions.

**Sister Browning:** Thank you, Sister Harkness.

Sister Aburto, what would you say to a loved one who may struggle with these feelings?

**Sister Aburto:** Well, I think that the first important thing that we need to do is to acknowledge that there is a challenge that needs to be addressed, and to try to do whatever we can to address it. I feel that whatever our situation is, we should not try to cope with it alone. Let us ask for help from Heavenly Father and the people around us.

You know, when my daughter suffered from depression and anxiety in her late teen years, it was hard for me because I didn't know how to help her. But then I remember offering a prayer one night, and then the next morning I woke up with this thought in my head that I really didn't know much about emotional ailments, and I said, "Okay, I need to learn more." So I started researching, and I felt that I was able to support her better because of that. So I feel that we all need to increase our knowledge and our understanding about these emotional ailments, especially now, when the effects of the pandemic will probably last for a while.

You know, the Church has provided articles, videos, and other resources, so we should probably study them and ponder them, and also read the endnotes used as sources. And of course we need to also turn to the scriptures and to the words of our living prophets, because we will find guidance in them.

Now, I know that there were some questions about suicide of loved ones. And regarding that, I would like to say that I know that it's very difficult to cope with that. I, myself, still don't understand my father's suicide. It is something very hard to grasp. But there are some things that I know. And I know that my father, my family and me, can receive the healing that the Savior offers through His Atonement. And I know that one day, I will see my father again, on the other side of the veil, and I'll be able to give him a hug and tell him how much I love him. I know that at that time, because of the Resurrection of Christ, our bodies and our souls will be restored, and we will have the opportunity to live in a state of happiness that has no end.

So, if you feel that you cannot take one more step, please ask for help. My plea to you is don't give up. There is hope. There is healing. There is joy. There is love surrounding you. Please turn to the Lord's redeeming grace and turn to the people around you. Don't give up. Please don't give up.

**Sister Browning:** Thank you, Sister Aburto, for that powerful answer.

Sister Craven, what thoughts would you share with someone who may be struggling?

**Sister Craven:** Well, I've been aware of emotional illnesses nearly my entire life. And I know that not all of these illnesses are permanent; some of them can be temporary, just based on the circumstances we might be in. But I do know that all of them need to be taken seriously. Something I've learned is that anybody struggling with emotional difficulties needs somebody in their life that they can trust. And I hope that we can be that person. I hope we can be observant, I hope we can be understanding and not judgmental. And I hope that we can be a trusted friend.

I have loved ones who have daily struggles combatting suicidal thoughts, and one dear loved one who even took their life. So I understand the fear and the anxiety and the reality of losing someone we love. And I know what it's like to have to call for emergency help. I also hope that we can follow the promptings of the spirit, because we just don't know if showing up at someone's door or making a phone call, or just sending a note might make all the difference in their life.

I know that the Lord is aware of each of us, and He wants us to be happy and healthy, and He wants us to find joy in life, because He said that "[We] are that we might have joy." And I believe that He really does want that for us. And if we turn to Him, He will help us know where to find the help that we need, whether that's for ourself or for somebody else that is in need of our help.

**Sister Aburto:** I love that. I love it.

**Sister Browning:** Thank you, Sister Craven, and thank you to all the sisters who provided such powerful, inspired answers to this question.

Sisters, mothers would love to hear a bit about your own personal experience being a young mother. What was life like for you when you were raising your young children? Can you remember what your daily schedule was like? Sister Harkness:

**Sister Harkness:** Well, that's a really fun question. I do remember a bit. Our five children were born very close together. And between their feeding schedules, colds, and upset tummies, and then the mounds of work for me to do, meals to cook, and of course regular housework, sometimes I couldn't tell you what day of the week it was, let alone if there was a schedule or not. Until it was Sunday. Then I remember patting myself on the back in my efforts to get everyone cleaned up, dressed up, and then sitting down in church, usually on time. To tell you the truth, that was sometimes my biggest scheduled accomplishment during the week. And I was okay with it. I knew that children grow up and someday my schedule and theirs would look differently.

Sisters, the work of motherhood is a ministry of love and sacrifice, and it's done by all women regardless if we have borne children or not. Women mother as we discern and meet the needs of others. It is a partnership with God. You know, I thought I understood motherhood pretty well until I watched my own daughters bring children into their families. Now, I see motherhood in a brighter light. It is more noble, more divine, and a whole lot busier than I remembered. The mothers of today really are real heroines. They are battling to keep the influences of the world out of their homes, and at the same time they are fiercely devoted to making their homes centers of faith in gospel learning.

Now, in the middle of all this, sometimes the intense demands of motherhood could cause us to feel trapped, without a chance to use or develop our talents and interests. But recently, Sister Jones taught us about hats. Do you remember in the last General Conference when she said that "women wear many hats, but that it is impossible, and unnecessary, that we wear them all at once." I just love this analogy. Because while it may be tempting to feel discouraged in the middle of the wonderful, crazy normalness of raising children, our consistent efforts to teach eternal truths are worth every effort, every sacrifice, and all our commitment.

**Sister Browning:** Thank you so much.

Sister Craven, as young mothers are doing the good work of building the "centers of faith" that Sister Harkness discussed, what did you do to keep from burning out? How did you make time to care for yourself?

**Sister Craven:** Oh, I think this whole conversation is just so relevant today, because I remember when each of our daughters were expecting their first babies. At some point, each of them

came to me, pretty much in tears saying, "Mom, I am so tired!" And my response to them each time, I'm afraid, was not very comforting, because I think I said something like, "I know, and I'm sorry, but it's never going to go away." But life in general can be exhausting for all of us, and it's really easy for anybody to get discouraged. Satan is particularly good at discouraging young mothers, I think. I remember being very discouraged at certain times myself.

My thoughts on the topic is really a question about what we might be able to do to help young mothers. One of our daughters lives away from us in another state and so I'm not able to help her with her children like I wish I could. But there is a sister in our daughter's ward who watches her three little kiddos for a couple hours every week just to give her a break. I absolutely love this sister. I asked our daughter once what she did during her "alone time," and she told me that sometimes she goes to the temple, sometimes she goes grocery shopping, but a lot of times she just stays home and takes a nap. It's okay for us to be away from our children for a while, and I think it's good for them, too. And if possible, I think that we can plan it in our budget to hire a babysitter occasionally, or like I did, I traded babysitting with a friend every week for just a few hours. And I can't tell you how good it was for my psyche. And it was also fun for our children because they had a regular playdate every week.

It's important to take time for ourselves, sisters. And that applies to all of us, not just those who have young children. And here is the truth that I absolutely know, that all of us as women, by our divine nature, we mother. It's just part of our eternal DNA. And so with those divine motherly instincts, wouldn't it be wonderful for each of us to consider ways that we might be able to help support our fellow Relief Society sisters who have small children?

**Sister Browning:** Thank you, Sister Craven.

Sister Aburto, what would you say to young mothers?

**Sister Aburto:** Well, besides what has been said, that I think it's just wonderful advice. I feel that sometimes we are just maybe too hard on ourselves, and two things come to my mind as we are talking about this. One of them is the consecration covenant that we make in the temple. I feel that probably we need to understand that better, and I think that I'm still trying to understand what it really means. But I feel that sometimes we think that it has to do only with callings or the time we spend at church. Or sometimes we think that it's something from the past or it's going to be in the future. But I feel that it has to do really with consecrating our life and what we are spending time on. So I feel that if we are helping our family, if we are embarked in school to prepare for the future, if we are caring for a sick family member, for example, or maybe we are working hard to provide for ourselves and our family, or if we are constantly looking for ways to minister to others and bringing them to Christ, or if we are constantly seeking the Lord's will for us, maybe then we are living the Law of Consecration, and we probably just need to be more intentional. I feel that one of the most important things is what we are becoming, and what we are helping others to become. So each morning we can offer our day to God, ask Him to help us, then have a constant prayer in our heart so the spirit can guide us. And then each night we can ask Him to accept our offer.

The second thing that comes to my mind also is that we need to look back and see the hand of the Lord in our life. I feel that when we hear other people's stories or we read stories in the scriptures, they're relating their stories in retrospective. Even though it may take us just one minute to read a chapter, a single chapter may have covered months or years, and a lot of the details and the daily routines are not spelled out. So let us take the time to look back and see the great things that we are achieving. Let us also picture the future and enjoy each moment. So let's not be so hard on ourselves. We are not as bad as we think, but of course we can always do better, a little bit better. And one more thing is that we don't have to do it all at once, just a little bit at a time, one day at a time, and one small step at a time.

You know, Sister Browning and I were talking about this just a few days ago, and she said something really profound. Can you please share it with us, Sister Browning, please?

**Sister Browning:** Sure. Thank you Sister Aburto for the invitation to share a thought. You know, this is a meaningful question to me, because I can so relate to our sisters seeking counsel on this topic because I too have been pondering and prayerfully seeking guidance to understand what opportunities there are for me to improve my mothering to my young children. I still have a young son at home, and I have a tendency to spend a lot of time navigating the temporal and temporary aspects of the work that I do in my home as a mother. The battles with the laundry, and the schoolwork, and the activities, the illnesses, the meal times, and what feels like a daily rinse and repeat cycle. But in all that good and important work addressing those temporal, and again, temporary needs, because some of these tasks will change with the passage of time, there is a knowledge that has been planted deep within my heart that seeks to remind me that motherhood is not just a condition of mortality, or a biological function measured only by this present season along a very long timeline of eternity. The eternal and exalted title of Mother, the call to be the mother of all living, was presented to women before our mortal experience and will continue with us after this estate.

I love this quote from President Monson. It says: "May each of us treasure this truth; one cannot forget mother and remember God. One cannot remember mother and forget God. Why? Because these two sacred persons, God and mother, partners in creation, in love, in sacrifice, in service, are as one." Can you imagine what learnings about that partnership, and our divine role of mother still await us? I know that each of us will be champions of this season of motherhood, and we will be prepared for the many glorious seasons ahead.

**Sister Aburto:** Thank you. Thank you so much for sharing that with us. I love it, thank you.

**Sister Harkness:** Beautiful.

**Sister Browning:** Thank you, sisters.

Our next topic is on comparison and judgment. Some of us inevitably see or hear things that make us feel really bad about ourselves and we begin to compare our life and efforts to others,

often leading to thoughts that we're simply not good enough or talented enough, spiritual enough, and so on. How can we resist the urge to compare ourselves to others? Sister Aburto, what would you share with us?

**Sister Aburto:** Again, I will say that I feel that we are just too hard on ourselves, and on others. You know, we need to realize that we are all imperfect people, in the road to perfection through the redeeming grace of Jesus Christ. But for some reason we have the tendency to label ourselves or others. And I know that we need ways to describe ourselves and our experiences in life, but we should not allow our experiences to define us. They can refine us, but they should not define us or others.

My advice is to try to avoid labeling. We have so much in common. We all have a divine nature and each of us is a child of God. Each of us is a child of heavenly parents. And we are all sisters and brothers, and we are all disciples of Christ. And we are all trying to become like Him, and we are making our best effort, and we need to believe that. And even though there is an ideal we are all trying to achieve, we are all on our way there together, and we are not there yet.

Something else is that I feel that there is not really a mold in the church, or a cookie cutter, you know, that in which we feel that we all have to fit. Because each of us is different. And if we think that there is a mold, then maybe it means that we don't really know the people around us. Some of us choose not to tell our whole story because it may be too painful. But I know, because it has happened to me many times, that when we take the time to hear other people's stories, when we take the time to get to know them, we realize that we all have struggles, that we are all healing from something. And so maybe that's the reason why we should treat everyone like if they are carrying a heavy burden, because there is a big chance that it is the truth, even the ones who seem well put together or who seem to have a perfect life. And I know that if we do this, our perspective will change. Because we are all trying and we all have something to contribute as well, through formal callings or through the spirit.

And then church, church is really a place to gather together, to strengthen each other, to make and renew our covenants, and to "gather together in one, all things in Christ." So we can then go on our daily life and participate in the work of salvation and exaltation with that knowledge and with that power in an organized way as members of Relief Societies, priesthood quorums and classes, and in individual ways in our personal life. So we have work to do. So let's lock our arms and do it together. So any of you would like to say something else about this?

**Sister Harkness:** I would, Sister Aburto. Thank you for that counsel there. And that makes me think of something that Sister Jean Bingham recently taught us about how "Satan incites comparison as a tool to create feelings of being superior or inferior" to each other. I think that is such a great observation. We can certainly see this happening in our day, don't you think? So often, when we compare ourselves with others, we focus on what they have, and then we desire their blessings, their talents, and their experiences. When we do this, we're taking our eyes off the Savior and instead looking sideways, you know, to the mortals in our lives. Sisters, I



think if we're not very careful here, we might completely overlook our divine, unique gifts, just like Sister Aburto was teaching us.

Think about it for a minute: if Satan can keep us distracted thinking about somebody else's talents, somebody else's gifts, or somebody else's skills, then we are not engaged in the work our Heavenly Father has sent us here to do, using the tools and gifts He expects us to use. Now, when we feel tempted to compare ourselves, and we will, we can choose instead to express gratitude for even the smallest blessing in our lives. I have found this works for me. When I choose to be grateful, I can make connections between the gifts Heavenly Father has given me, and the work He has asked me to do. It helps me to avoid comparison.

Now, we all know that Heavenly Father is very generous in giving. But are we equally generous in receiving and using what He has given us? Sisters, through personal revelation, the Holy Ghost will help us come to understand more about our divine nature and gifts, those that we have been given to accomplish our mission on earth.

**Sister Browning:** Thank you sisters for that inspired instruction.

Sister Craven, we'd love your counsel on this next topic. We know that family relationships are important, but we do recognize that sometimes they can be a real struggle and cause pain that we may feel by our family members. How can we let go of the pain of difficult relationships and be at peace?

**Sister Craven:** Relationships, whether they're with our family or if they're with friends, are meant to be supporting and loving, and I think they should be fun as well. But sometimes we find ourselves in a hurtful situation, and we find it very difficult to let go of that hurt and anger. So this question really resonated with me, because there was a time that I was in a similar situation, and because of the circumstances I found myself very hurt, and betrayed, and I was extremely angry. And for years I let those feelings fester within my heart, and I became dependent on somebody else's actions to determine my mood, my thoughts, and I'm really sorry to say, even what I talked about. It was not good for my emotional or for my physical health. And it took me a really, really long time to get over it. And I say that because my heart was so hard that it did take a long time. I eventually realized that I had created a trap for myself, and I started to pray really hard to know what to do.

And then, I had a personal revelation. And it was as if a voice had entered into my mind, and I heard the words of the Lord which we read in Mormon chapter 8 that says that "man shall not smite neither shall he judge, for judgment is mine, saith the Lord." And then I realized that I cannot be the judge of anyone. That the only thing that I have to choose and to judge are my own thoughts and my own actions. And I recognized that I was carrying a burden that the Lord had already carried. And I can't adequately describe how I felt at that moment, but I felt lighter, and for the first time in a really long time, I felt free. I felt free from the bondage of such intense anger. Now that doesn't mean that we have to be best buddies with everyone, but we do need to be kind, and we need to refrain from speaking ill of anybody, because that just fosters

contention in our hearts, and we know that contention comes from Satan. And that even includes using sarcastic remarks, because they can be very damaging and hurt feelings as well. The Savior, I know, will bear our burdens if we allow Him to. We can let go of hurt feelings and anger when we allow the Savior's Atonement to work in our lives.

But I'd also like to just mention briefly the importance about communication because we're a church of councils. You may have heard it said that revelation is sprinkled among us, and I believe that. But we have to remember that counseling is more than just talking, that it requires us to listen with our ears and with our hearts. My husband often says that "reasonable people working together can come up with reasonable solutions." And I love this familiar scripture that we find in Matthew that says, "For when two or three are gathered together, in my name, there am I in the midst of them." And to me the most important part of that scripture are the words "in my name," because when we counsel together and invite the Lord into our conversations, and seek personal revelation, there are so many questions and concerns that can be resolved.

**Sister Browning:** I love that. I love that. Thank you for that wise counsel, Sister Craven.

Sisters, as we know, we're unable to predict the future. Wouldn't that be something if we could? Unforeseen circumstances absolutely will happen during our lives. How might we build spiritual and emotional resilience that can prepare us for unexpected personal difficulties in the future? And I'd love to hear from everyone on this question. Sister Harkness, let's start with you.

**Sister Harkness:** Oh that's a great question. You know, you're right. Even though we can't see into the future, there are no surprises to God. He knows the end from the beginning, and we can be assured He is always several steps ahead of our present circumstances. Now, we know that He prepared a way for our growth before we were born on earth, so it should be no surprise to us that He continues to prepare us for unforeseen events and experiences that are yet to come. As you look back in your life, can you see examples of how God was preparing you for the very trials you are experiencing right now? They are there. And the spirit will help us understand Heavenly Father's efforts to prepare and strengthen us.

You know, sometimes when we are in the middle of a difficult trial, time seems to slow down and every bump in the road of our journey can feel more pronounced, more painful, and perhaps even more unfair. Disciples of Christ have never been spared difficulties, hardships or tragic accidents, but we do have the reassurance that we are never alone. Just as God prepares us to meet our challenges, He stands close by, helping us endure them. And one way He does it is through personal revelation. President Russell M. Nelson recently told us "that when we're surrounded by uncertainty and fear," you know, kind of like right now in our situations, "our Heavenly Father knows that what will help us most is to hear His Son." Sisters, we can feel prepared for the future by heeding President Nelson's plea for us to develop or increase our ability to receive personal revelation. Hearing His Son is Heavenly Father's way of helping us prepare for the future and endure the present in faith.

**Sister Browning:** That's great. Thank you, Sister Harkness.

Sister Craven, what will you share with us?

**Sister Craven:** Well, this pandemic has certainly caused the unforeseen return home of more than 30,000 missionaries, and I know that this has been difficult for many missionaries and their families. My husband was a mission president, and I can tell you from our experience that this is also a very difficult time for mission presidents and their companions. But while we were serving our mission, missionaries returned home early for a variety of reasons, sometimes well beyond their control such as physical and emotional illnesses. But before those missionaries returned home, my husband always shared with them this scripture that is found in Doctrine and Covenants section 124, and I'd like to read it.

It says: "Verily, verily I say unto you, that when I give a commandment to any of the sons [or daughters] of men to do a work unto my name, and those sons of men go with all their might and with all they have to perform that work, and cease not their diligence, and their enemies come upon them and hinder them from performing that work, behold, it behooveth me to require that work no more at the hands of those sons of men, but to accept of their offerings."

Now, the enemy could be many things. It could be an illness or even a pandemic. But for any who have returned home from a mission early and worthy, or in the spirit of repentance, we should refrain from judging. And those missionaries should not put an asterisk by the side of their mission. We hope that they can each declare confidently when and where they served without adding any type of a qualifier. As the scripture I just shared tells us, the Lord will accept their offering.

**Sister Browning:** What relevant counsel, thank you Sister Craven. Sister Aburto:

**Sister Aburto:** Well, I'm so grateful for the counsel that has been given. And I know that we are living also through really peculiar times right now. But I feel that this is a time to reflect on and cherish the blessings we have received from God. I feel that this is the time to get to know ourselves better, and to get to know the people around us. This is the time really to minister to others according to our circumstances.

And we are seeing this around the world as people are just helping each other in different ways. It's so wonderful to see people helping their friends, their neighbors, and even people—others that they don't know personally. So I feel that this is a time to see the miracles around us, and to take the time to hear the Lord, to hear His voice, to trust and believe in God's Plan of Happiness. And I think that like we are reading this week in the Book of Mormon, this is a time to "lift up our heads and rejoice, and put our trust in God."

**Sister Browning:** Thank you, sisters.

Sisters, here's another topic that is of significant interest to a lot of our sisters that wrote in. We have been blessed by many messages from the brethren and the sisters teaching us about the priesthood of God. And we know that the power of keeping priesthood covenants blesses both men and women. Sister Aburto, how can we be more prepared to call upon the power of God in our lives?

**Sister Aburto:** Well, first of all, I would like to read something that President Nelson told us women last October. And he said, "Those who are endowed in the house of the Lord receive a gift of God's priesthood power by virtue of their covenant, along with a gift of knowledge to know how to draw upon that power." I feel that we just need to open our eyes and ears so we can hear what the Lord is trying to teach each of us, so we can hear Him and really understand what this means for each of us.

And I also feel that all that we are learning about God's power is not new doctrine. Some of the basic principles are that all of God's children are invited to make covenants with God. And that when we keep the covenants we have made, God blesses us according to the terms of the covenant, and His power and blessings flow into our lives. We are endowed with priesthood power to do the work of God on the earth through our covenants and our righteousness, and the more we act on it, the more we will receive it. The truth is that we have already been drawing upon God's power without knowing it, but maybe we just need to be more intentional in our personal life and in our callings, as we hear and follow the voice of the Savior.

I want to tell you something that happened to me in Johannesburg, South Africa a few years ago. I was there on an assignment, and on a Sunday evening we were going to have a devotional with young adults. And that was a busy day, and I remember that that morning I had some impressions, and I kind of wrote down some kind of outline of the things that I wanted to share with those young adults that evening, and I thought I was ready. But then, just a few minutes before that devotional started, just a few minutes before, I had this feeling that probably I needed to make a change, that I didn't need to just give them a message, but that we needed to counsel together. And it was a little bit scary because I was like, 'Really, is that what I need to do?' So I followed the prompting, and I just, you know, I just gave them a short message of about five minutes, and then I asked them, "What are your concerns? What is in your heart? What keeps you awake at night?"

And it was amazing to see all those young adults coming up with things that mostly had to do with their friends. And that was really, really, something that impressed me a lot. Because many of them were worried about their friends who suffered from anxiety and depression, or their friends who were not coming to church, or their friends who were not members. And they were also worried about education, and how to help each other find the best options. So what we did is that day that they divided in small groups, and each group started counseling together about each of those issues, just for a few minutes. And then when we reconvened again, it was so amazing to feel that spirit that came to that room as they were sharing the things that they

had felt in their heart as they counseled together that they could do for their friends. The amount of energy and faith and power that was present in that room was just amazing. After we ended the meeting—we had to stay in the building for a little while because some leaders needed to have a meeting—and then when we left the building, 40 minutes after the devotional had ended, there were so many of those young adults still there, counseling together and finding ways to bless their friends. They were really talking about ministering to each other.

So that evening, what I learned was that when we are humble enough, when we follow the spirit, we are empowered, and we can use that power to bless the lives of our brothers and sisters around us. And that's what those young adults were doing. They were finding ways to help and they had decided to go and do the things that they had been inspired to do. So for me that is a great example of what feeling that power is, and that's what I learned that evening.

**Sister Browning:** Thank you, Sister Aburto.

Sister Harkness, Sister Aburto discussed being endowed with priesthood power. What does it mean that women have been endowed with God's priesthood power?

**Sister Harkness:** Well, that's a great question and it's certainly one that so many women have. But first, when we talk about priesthood power, we must be careful to never compare it to the model that the world assumes about how a person gets, maintains, or loses power. In the world, as we know, power is often an all or nothing possession. There's never enough of it to go around, it seems, and it's often used to control others. It's usually also maintained only by force. In contrast, though, God's priesthood power is distributed very differently. It is given, bestowed, conferred and shared based on conditions of worthiness. It operates on the principles of righteousness. The use of God's power elevates and transforms our characters to become more like the giver who is God. Our understanding of God's power is "distilled" upon us as we keep covenants made through priesthood ordinances.

Now, when God covenanted with Abraham, he promised that through his posterity all the families of the earth would be blessed with the "blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, even life eternal." As we now enter into any sacred covenant, from baptism through sealing covenants in temples, we do so by God's priesthood authority, which allows our covenants to be binding on earth and in heaven. Then, as Sister Aburto was talking about, as we faithfully keep these priesthood covenants, God bestows upon us His promised power and blessings, including the highest blessings of salvation and exaltation.

Sisters, what could we learn if we ask ourselves questions like: What are the blessings that I received from each covenant I have made with God? And what am I empowered to do because of the covenants I have made with God? And also, how can I then share these covenant blessings with others? Let's think about this for just a minute. The meaning of the word "endowment" refers to a gift that is given to bless those in need. As we consider how the

powerful blessings we receive from keeping our covenants meet our dearest needs, we can better understand God's divine power and its exalting purpose.

**Sister Browning:** Thank you Sister Harkness. Thank you so much for those inspired questions that we should consider.

Sister Craven, how is having a better understanding of how we can receive God's power in our lives a game changer for women?

**Sister Craven:** Well, I was thinking that last October, during the Women's Session in General Conference, that President Nelson asked each of us to study the priesthood so that we could understand it better. This is what he said: "You might begin with Doctrine and Covenants sections 84 and 107. Those sections will lead you to other passages. . .as your understanding increases and as you exercise faith in the Lord and His priesthood power, your ability to draw upon this spiritual treasure that the Lord has made available will increase." So I did what the prophet asked us to do, and I have to tell you that my understanding has increased, and I'm really grateful for the things that I've learned.

It wasn't until I was an adult that I started to understand the Oath and the Covenant of the Priesthood, which is found in the 84th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, one of the sections the prophet asked us to study. I really never paid much attention to it because I thought it really only applied to my dad and my brothers. But as I matured in the gospel, I began to realize that it actually had everything to do with me.

So I now understand a little bit better that as we keep the priesthood covenants that we make in the temple, that the Lord blesses us with an oath that He will bestow upon us some wonderful blessings. What we covenant to do is to receive the priesthood or the power of God into our lives, which includes making and keeping sacred priesthood ordinances and covenants. But now listen to what the Lord promises us. And he promises us, with an oath which He cannot break: "We will be sanctified by the spirit," "we will be numbered among the elect of God," and "all that the Lord has will be given to us."

So back to the question: What do we do with this knowledge? Sisters, we do the same thing that we've been doing all along, but I believe that we can do it with greater confidence that we have power to do the things that we've been called upon to do. I believe it gives us energy, and I think that it gives us a greater understanding of the importance of our callings and the responsibilities that we have in the work of salvation and exaltation.

**Sister Browning:** Thank you, Sister Craven.

Well, sisters, we have about 10 minutes left in our discussion, and I wanted to take some time to ask a question that we heard from quite a few of our sisters, so that we can get a bit of a response here. It's regarding church callings. What would you say to women who may feel

discouraged or who feel like they're capable and are willing to serve, but don't feel like they're needed? Sister Harkness, can you provide us some instruction on this topic?

**Sister Harkness:** Sure. Great question. You know, so often when we talk about the work of the Lord, we talk in terms of our present callings, and we say things like, "I'm the Relief Society president," or "I'm a Sunday School teacher," "a family history consultant." And sometimes we say, "I'm just a Primary teacher." With very few exceptions, every calling in the church is temporary. We will have many over the course of a lifetime. And there may even be stretches of time when we don't have a designated calling.

You know, the Lord has said, "if we have desires to serve Him, we are called to the work." You and I express our desire to serve God when we make and keep sacred priesthood covenants. These covenants bless and empower us to do the Lord's work just like we mentioned a few minutes ago when we were talking about the priesthood. What a wonderful thing it is to be called to the Lord's work as we keep our covenants. President Nelson reminded us what this work looks like. Do you remember when he said, "the gathering of Israel is the greatest challenge, cause, and work on the earth"? And he also reminded us as women that we are all invited and desperately needed in the work.

When we focus on the work and not the title of our temporary calling, we will see there is enough work for us to do. It is all around us. And we can participate no matter our circumstances, marital status, age, or experience in church leadership. Remember that anytime we do anything that helps another person take a step along the covenant path, we are helping to gather scattered Israel. And this is the work that we all have in common as covenant disciples of Jesus Christ. Every calling in the church is involved in this same work. Some may do it in a family history library or at their home computer. Some do it in Primary singing time, and some play the piano. Some help youth learn how to lead. And many, many sisters minister like angels. As we engage in this work that we've been called to do as disciples of Christ, we can be sure that it will require our best effort, our courage, our time, skill, energy and creativity. But sisters, we will be blessed for every effort we make in the work of the Lord because, you know, everything we do is for Him.

**Sister Browning:** Thank you for that important counsel, Sister Harkness.

Sister Aburto, we've received numerous questions about ministering. What do we need to know? How can you help us with this topic?

**Sister Aburto:** Okay, I would just like to say a few things. I know that much has been said about ministering, but I feel that ministering is putting into practice the two great commandments, which are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love others like the Lord loves us. So if we love God, if we truly love God, we will naturally feel love for others. So let's look for revelation on how to minister to other people. Let's get to know the person, and asking them how they would like to be ministered to is one of the best ways to know. Also praying by name is very powerful. We can ask in sincere prayer, "What can I do for this person

so she or he can get closer to the Savior?" And many times our presence may be the most important thing that we can offer.

I love what Brother Petelo said in this last conference when he said, "We cannot sit idly and expect the Lord to use us in His great work. We must not wait for those who need our aid to seek us out." So let's just keep finding that revelation and following the revelation that we feel and that we receive on how to minister to others. I know that this is God's work, and that He will help us. I know that He will.

**Sister Browning:** Thank you, Sister Aburto.

As we wrap up here with our last few minutes together, sisters, what are your final thoughts that you'd like to share? Sister Harkness:

**Sister Harkness:** Oh, thank you, Sister Browning. Before we end, I would like to share a few things based on a recent conversation I had with a good friend of mine. She is going through an experience that would cause many of us to ask a lot of questions, some of which have no answer. When I asked her, "How are you holding onto your faith with what you are experiencing?" She said to me, "Well, I read my scriptures every day, I pray many times every day, and I have committed to myself that I will never allow someone else's comments or example to prevent me from living the gospel of Jesus Christ." I was so touched by her answer. She's a wonderful example to me of determined discipleship.

These three things could also help us all when we have unanswered gospel questions. You know, questions like gender issues, church history facts, Heavenly Mother, and so many others. Sisters, even when there are things we don't know or understand, we can always know the most essential truths. For example, we can know our Heavenly Father loves us because we are His children. We can know that Jesus Christ is our Savior and Redeemer and that peace in this life is found by following in His footsteps. We can know what His voice has to tell us as we improve our ability to receive personal revelation. And we can know God will always fulfill His promises. Sometimes though, His promises may look like they are very far away from us, you know, kind of out on the horizon somewhere. But sisters, their distance has nothing to do with their very real existence. God's promises are sure. I know we can believe Him. You are loved. May you go forward in faith, with a firm commitment to keep your covenants, relying always on the merits and mercy of our Savior Jesus Christ.

**Sister Browning:** Thank you, Sister Harkness. Sister Craven:

**Sister Craven:** I would also like to end by saying something about personal revelation. I love that the Lord knows me so well, and He knows how I hear Him best. There are times when I hear Him in the middle of crazy, loud chaos and confusion. But mostly it's during times that I'm quiet that I hear Him the best, like when I'm reading my scriptures or saying my prayers or just being really still. But there was a time when I was worried about my ability to stay focused during my prayers and scripture study because I found myself just being distracted, like a lot.



Things just kept popping into my head that had nothing to do with what I was praying about or studying about, and I was really bothered about that for a long time until I realized that the Lord was actually speaking to me. I wasn't being distracted at all, but rather that the spirit was bringing thoughts and ideas to my remembrance that the Lord needed me to know or do. So now I pay really close attention to those thoughts that pop into my mind.

But I know that we all have questions. We don't know the answers to many things. And I certainly have a lot of questions as well. But this just does not shake my faith. I have had spiritual experiences in the past that I draw upon when I need to draw upon them. And I intentionally now seek for spiritual experiences that I can draw upon in the future. Those experiences help me stay rooted in the gospel. Now, I don't know everything, but I do know what I know, and I know that I'm a daughter of heavenly parents, I know that Jesus is my Savior, and I know that when we seek revelation by counseling with the Lord in all of our doings, that He will direct us for good. And I count on that.

**Sister Browning:** Thank you, Sister Craven. Sister Aburto:

**Sister Aburto:** Well, I would just like to say that I know that there have been many questions that have not been answered, but we just need to keep looking for that revelation from God, and I know that we will receive it. And also, when we seek spiritual knowledge, let's concentrate in the principles, in the doctrine, in the promises. And let us also remember that repentance is a joyful thing.

I also would like to take just a minute or two to invite all of us to try to understand better what Relief Society is. You know, since I have had this calling, I have had sisters coming to me and apologizing that they used to say things like, "Oh, Sister Aburto, I'm so sorry I am not active in the Relief Society because I have been serving in Primary or Young Women." And you know what I do? I just give a hug to that sister, and I tell them, "My dear sister, you are among the most active members of Relief Society because you are blessing our children and our youth."

So I would just like to tell all of us, Relief Society is not a room in a building, it's not an hour every two weeks when we get together. It's not an activity. It is the women of the church. It is us, each of us, all of us. And we can be armed with righteousness and with the power of God to prepare the earth for the Second Coming, to save souls, to defend our soul and our homes from spiritual dangers, to "declare glad tidings of great joy unto this generation," to perpetuate righteousness in an organized way, collectively and also individually. And so, we are always in Relief Society.

So let us "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all of these things shall be added unto us." Let us fill ourselves with charity so the doctrine of the priesthood "can distill upon our souls like the dews of heaven." I know that we have a Father in Heaven who loves us. I know that we have a Savior, and that we need to try to hear Him, and follow His spirit, that will guide us through our life. Please, my dear sisters, keep trying. Please don't give up. We love

you. We pray for you. You are laying the foundation of a great work, and out of small things proceed that which is great. And I say this humbly, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

**All:** Amen.

**Sister Browning:** Amen. Thank you, sisters, for this beautiful conversation today. Thank you for sharing your thoughts and experiences and instruction with us. It's been a privilege, and truly inspiring to learn and feel the spirit together in this very unique way. We know that during this time every day holds a new set of feelings for all of us, and we've been so strengthened by your words, by your testimonies, and by the spirit that we've felt. And to our dear sisters who have joined us to listen to today's conversation, we love you, and we pray for you, particularly that you keep safe and healthy, until we meet again.