

“The Significant Impact of Single Saints”

Angela Ahn

This address was given in May 2023
at the BYU Women’s Conference
©2023 by Brigham Young University Women’s Conference
All rights reserved.

For further information, email:
womens_conference@byu.edu
or write to:
253 Harman Continuing Education Building
Provo, Utah 84602
801-422-7692
Website: womensconference.byu.edu

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

Good morning sisters. Today is the culmination of months of prayer and preparation, and even though I have my entire talk written out, I want to speak to you today as one friend speaks to another.

I’ve spent many, many years listening, supporting, validating, and encouraging my single friends. It’s not my usual to offer counsel or advice, as most people just want to be heard. But today, speaking in this capacity, I get to share some of the hard-won wisdom that has taken me decades to cultivate.

I know how much unsolicited advice is unwelcome (just ask my two brothers) but as I told my brothers, this is the one time I get to give solicited advice! These sisters who have come to Women’s Conference are seeking.

So, I ask you, what are you seeking for today? Why did you come today, and, why, particularly, did you come to this class?

I pray for the Holy Ghost to teach you, as He is the true teacher, despite any personal weakness of mine.

My Story

When I was fifteen years old, my parents were hit by a drunk driver on their way to the Los Angeles California Temple.

When my brothers and I arrived at the hospital, we were informed that my dad had already passed away and that my mom had suffered massive traumatic injuries.

My mom ended up surviving, but her life was nothing like the one she had before. After the accident, she was no longer able to move, speak, eat, or drink. For the next eighteen years until her passing, she lay in a hospital bed, staring at the ceiling, or propped up in a wheelchair.

So, the moral of the story is, “Don’t go to the temple.” (Just kidding)

I was fifteen when the accident happened, and next year, I will be turning fifty years old. This is unbelievable to me. I will have lived 50 years as a single, never married, active member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Why have I chosen to stay, when so many others have left?

I have chosen to stay because for me, there is no other choice. I believe in Christ, and I believe this is His church that was restored by the prophet Joseph Smith, which provides us with all the things we need for salvation and exaltation. I believe in the Book of Mormon and that President Nelson is our prophet today.

My testimony is based on Jesus Christ, and not on my marital status. It’s not based on the people, a leader, the programs, my friends, my family, or anything else. It’s not based on if life is going well, or if it’s really, really painful. My testimony is based on Jesus Christ.

I know these things and continue to know these things, because I pay the daily price of discipleship to know them.

President M. Russell Ballard has said, “We should understand that eternal life is not simply a question of current marital status but of discipleship.”¹

Thus, my central message is that as single members of the Church, by strengthening our discipleship of Christ, we can experience joy, peace, connection, full participation, and make an impact, NOW; and these are not things we wait for until we get married.

Experiencing Joy Now

First, by strengthening our discipleship of Christ, we can experience joy now.

I grew up in the 80s, and the general idea my friends and I had was that if we kept the commandments, we would get married, have a family, and live happily ever after.

But what if this equation was backwards? What if instead of doing A (keeping the commandments), which leads to B (getting married), equaling C (being happy), that we turn this equation around?

What if we do C (live joyfully now), by doing A (keeping the commandments or strengthening our discipleship of Christ) and then that equals C (attracting marriage and family, whether in this life or the next?)

Our joy and eternal well-being are not dependent on an outside source or circumstance, they are dependent on Christ.

Kristen Oaks, wife of President Dallin H. Oaks, was 52 years old when she got married (which means, I still have a chance)! She relates the following powerful story. She was full of worry and frustration about her single situation and her advancing years, so she sought out a priesthood blessing.

The words spoken in that blessing stay with her this day and ring truer to her as time passes. She can still quote them: ‘If you cannot bear the difficulties and challenges of single life, you will never be able to bear the difficulties and challenges of married life.’²

She said she was a bit stunned.

Those words were a call to action for her to make her life wonderful, regardless of any situation or difficulty she faced.

In the scriptures, we learn that the “same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world.”³ This not only applies to when we transition from mortal life to eternal life, but when we move from one circumstance of our lives to another.

Living happily is largely a decision. This may be hard to believe, but to a very large degree, it is. After decades of being miserable, I realized, just like Sister Oaks, how much choice I had in the matter. The scriptures teach us that we are “free to choose” life or captivity.⁴ So, is the way we are thinking about our life’s circumstances bringing us life or keeping us in captivity?

The scriptures also teach us that the devil seeks “that all men might be miserable like unto himself.”⁵ One day when I read that passage, it hit me that if I am miserable, then Satan is winning!

I don’t want Satan to win! I determined that I would not allow Satan to win over my life, and I would choose to be happy.

I want to demonstrate the importance of living joyfully now, and how that relates to the joy we can feel in marriage.

This is the Chinese character for marriage.



It consists of two characters, put together. Each individual character is the symbol for happiness. Thus, the two symbols put together means, “Double happiness.”

Isn’t this such a fitting description of how we can be as single or married people? We can be happy as individuals first, and then, when we bring one happy individual with another happy individual together, we get double the happiness, or the ideal definition of marriage.

To give another example of the importance of being happy now, a few years ago, my dear friend Ester and I took the trip of a lifetime to Italy and France. This next photo captures perfectly what it means to live joyfully as a latter-day single saint (photo not available).

It happened to be male fashion week in Florence the week we visited, and there were models walking everywhere. It was then that I knew that there was a God, and He loved me.

But if you could look deeper and see what was happening beyond this picture, you'd see that the only reason I took this trip was because my friend Ester had invited me. How had I met Ester? Through ministering. I was her ministering sister. Had I never fulfilled my ministering assignment, I may have never had a friendship with Ester and gone on this trip with her. Who knew that trips to Europe can count as ministering!

On this trip, Ester and I had both brought a copy of the Book of Mormon to share with someone. The moment we stepped off the plane, we shared one copy with our taxi driver. Ester had also brought a stack of pass-a-long cards, and we passed them out to our tour guides, to friends we met while waiting in lines, and to our Air BnB host. We invited them to come to Salt Lake City and to visit the temple. We even forgot to get off our train one morning because we were busy discussing the Come Follow Me lesson for that day with someone.

When a young European man and his grandmother were denied entrance into a beautiful church because they had the wrong tickets, we gave them ours. Later, when this young man emailed us and invited us to coffee, we told him we were already ready to leave for our next destination but told him the next time he saw two missionaries from our church, he could thank us by listening to their message.

This is a perfect example of how by strengthening our discipleship of Christ, we can experience joy now.

We Can Find Enduring Peace Now

Second, by strengthening our discipleship of Christ, we can find enduring peace now, even when there is a gap between our hopes and our reality.

Are we feeling enduring peace? Or are we feeling anxiety, panic, chaos, and worry? In essence, are we feeling peace by focusing on Christ, or are we feeling fear by focusing on other things?

Fear takes our valuable time, focus, energy, happiness, and peace. If unchecked, it can consume us, paralyze us, and send us into a downward spiral. We catastrophize everything, and then our fear becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Fear can even bring us to the “gulf of misery and endless wo”⁶ and if we allow it, it can keep us there by continually worrying.

I felt this way for a good 20 years of my life, after my parents' car accident. I was always afraid that something bad was going to happen to me. As such, I lived in total fear.

How did I overcome that? By changing the way I think. I changed what I focused on.

I had to train myself, literally exercise my mind, like I exercise my body, to cast out fear and negative thoughts with ones focused on Christ.

Let me give some examples of thoughts focused on fear, versus thoughts focused on Christ.

“I feel worthless being single,” versus “I am a child of God.” “We are daughters of a Heavenly Father and our lives have meaning, purpose, and direction.” “Know ye not that you are created in the image of God...?”⁷

“I am terrified of being alone,” versus “I am grateful to the Savior for all the people I have in my life. I have my parents, siblings, my ward family, my friends, my co-workers, etc.,” or “I am grateful that the Savior has given me the power and agency to serve, and in this way, make friends.

“I can’t go to the temple by myself,” versus “I’m looking forward to spending time communing with my Heavenly Father; I have a lot I want to talk to Him about,” or “I wonder if there’s anyone who wants to attend the temple as well? Maybe I could offer them a ride.”

The Savior has said, “Look to me in every thought, doubt not, fear not.”⁸

President Russell M. Nelson has said, “It is mentally rigorous to strive to look unto Him in every thought. But, when we do, our doubts and fears flee.”⁹

Thus, by strengthening our discipleship of Christ, we can find enduring peace now, even when there is a gap between our hopes and our reality.

We Can Experience Connectedness Now

Third, by strengthening our discipleship of Christ, we can realize our desires for service and family connections as single members of the Church.

Some mistakenly believe that connection and belonging has to do with marriage and family, and that it is impossible for a person to feel connection and belonging without it.

I’ve been alone for most of my life, but I’m not lonely. I live a very abundant life, full of meaningful connections. Most of the time I am not thinking about myself but of others, so I don’t get mired down in self-pity or my own problems. Most importantly, I have a relationship with my Savior.

Do we remember when Christ felt alone? It was when the Father withdrew from Him while he was suffering the Atonement.¹⁰ It is the loss of our connectedness with our Father that causes such great loneliness.

One the greatest reasons why the Savior wants us to immerse ourselves in daily scripture study is because He wants us to feel love and connection with Him, every single day, through the gift of the Holy Ghost.

God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost are one in purpose¹¹, and they in turn invite us to be one in purpose with them. As we learn the will of the Father and Son through the gift of the Holy Ghost and as we align our will to theirs, we become one with deity.

What would it feel like to have this connectedness? “For if God be with us, then who can be against us?”¹²

This is one of the major reasons I do not feel alone. Every day I immerse myself in scripture study, which means reading, pondering, writing, listening, praying, and applying what I’ve learned to fit to my needs that very day.

But the connectedness and love don’t stop there. God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ then ask us to engage in their work, to share that connectedness and love with others.

How do we do this? Elder D. Todd Christofferson has said, “Belonging comes not as we wait for it but as we reach out to help one another...”¹³

Christ set the example himself, “For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life...”¹⁴

Christ taught his disciples, “...ye are they whom I have chosen to minister unto this people...”¹⁵

That is the same invitation he gives to us. We literally are called “ministering” sisters in the work we are called to do in service to each other, but ministering doesn’t have to be a formal calling in the ward. In any relationship we have with anyone, we can minister, which means inviting people to come closer to Christ.

Let me share what connection through ministering looks like to me.

Most of the people I have been partnered with or the people I have been asked to minister to are not people I would have chosen as my friends (and I mean that in the most loving way and they would agree with me).

Many of the people I was assigned to visit allowed me to visit, and some did not. Many times, I ministered alone. Most of my life I would minister to others but not be ministered to. However, none of this mattered.

I have found that by ministering, it doesn’t really matter who is doing the ministering or who is being ministered to. I’ve found through ministering, my need for connection is still met.

I ministered one time to a young sister in her twenties whose testimony was shaken, and she didn’t know if the church was true anymore. She didn’t really care for me to visit, but that didn’t matter to me. I could still minister to her in other ways.

I thought about what it was like to be in my twenties and what counsel I would’ve benefitted from back then. I took the time to write meaningful letters with spiritual insights, submitted her name to the prayer roll, fasted for her, and prayed for her.

Although I rarely saw her in person, I still had a connection with her, because I had made the effort to love her.

Another time, one of the sisters I had ministered to was going through such a hard time that she wanted to take her life. In a conversation with her boyfriend, he asked her if she had anyone she could talk with and she mentioned me, her ministering sister.

This gal is very outgoing, and has many family members and friends, but the connection she felt with me was significant enough to her that she felt that I was someone she could call upon in her time of need. I do not think I am different from anyone else in any way, I simply did my ministering to love this sister.

This is the power of connectedness through ministering.

Thus, by strengthening our discipleship of Christ, we can realize our desires for connections now.

We Can Participate Fully in Christ's Church Now

Fourth, by strengthening our discipleship of Christ, we can push past worries about our place in a family-centered Church and serve faithfully and participate fully in the gospel now.

Satan wants us to believe that as singles we don't have a place in Christ's family-centered church.

Our place is right here, in the kingdom of God, fully rooted in His Church, built on the foundation of Christ. Don't let anyone tell us differently, especially ourselves.

Elder D. Todd Christofferson, in his talk, "The Doctrine of Belonging," said, "It is a sad irony ... when someone, feeling he or she doesn't meet the ideal in all aspects of life, concludes that he doesn't, or she doesn't belong in the very organization designed by God to help us progress toward the ideal."

I sometimes hear single people say something along the lines of, "I have nothing in common with the married people in my ward."

That is what the adversary wants us to believe, to draw lines and to divide us. The Lord has asked us to become a Zion people, to be of one heart, and one mind.¹⁶ The prophet has increasingly asked us to avoid contention.¹⁷ While having this mindset is not necessarily contentious, it's certainly a way to build walls, and ultimately to not try to make connection or be involved, and it's an easy way to blame everyone else and our situation.

I heard an excellent comment by Lori Newbold, a single sister, who was asked about what she does to feel included in a family-centered church. She said that although she may not be able to relate to what it's like to be married and have children; and although married people might not know what it's like to be single, what they could both relate with and have together is a shared experience in Christ. I found that profound.

Having a shared experience in Christ does not require an extra program for singles, or an event, or anything else. It requires the same thing we've always had. Ministering to one another, edifying lessons focused on Christ, serving together in a calling, worshipping in the temple, and missionary work. There are limitless ways to have a shared experience in Christ.

Our inclusion in a family-centered church is largely if not almost entirely dependent on us, not the bishop, not the Relief Society president, not the ward members, but us. This is a joyous reality. Why? Because it puts us in the driver's seat. It puts us in control. We don't have to wait around for others to do something, to reach out, to visit, to invite. The responsibility is ours, and the more we put into it, the more we'll get out of it.

My roommate and I recently aged out of our singles ward, which serves 31-46 years old. Our new ward consists mainly of senior citizens in their 70s and 80s. When we looked around our ward and saw the members who were mainly in the twilight years of their lives, we could've easily done a few things. We could've stopped attending church, we could've found another ward to attend, we could've felt sorry for ourselves, we could've ward hopped, or a multitude of other choices.

What did we do instead? We went up and bore our testimonies to our new ward members. We asked to be ministering sisters. We showed up for ward building cleanup. We contributed to the

discussions during Relief Society. We befriended those who were sitting alone and helped with others' children. We volunteered to help at the ward Christmas party, and we visited our neighbors. We even held a lunch and invited all the singles in our ward from ages 30-70.

In doing so, we have become fast friends with many in the ward and feel loved and included. One elegant, older lady who is married to a saintly elderly man told us in private that this was her third marriage, and to not lose hope.

Kristen M. Oaks said, "In a family-centered Church, you may sometimes doubt you have a place—nothing could be further from the truth. Every individual counts. Never forget the plan of salvation is in full effect for everyone, single or married."¹⁸

What is really stopping us from serving faithfully and participating fully in the gospel. Nothing, only ourselves.

Thus, by strengthening our discipleship of Christ, we can push past worries about our place in a family-centered Church and serve faithfully and participate fully in the gospel now.

We Can Make an Impact Now

Fifth, by strengthening our discipleship of Christ, we can focus on the opportunities the Lord has given us and utilize our unique gifts, life experience, strengths, and available time to make a significant impact in the lives of others.

As members of the Church, we have covenanted to consecrate our time, talents, and everything with which the Lord has blessed us to help others and build up God's kingdom on earth.¹⁹

President Eyring has said, "To you I wish to say how much the Lord loves and trust you. And even more, I wish to tell you how much depends on you."²⁰

We have been taught to "deny not the gifts of God," for they have been given to profit all.²¹

Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ are depending on us. Us. Single sisters in the church. Our unique gifts, life experiences, strength, and time are exactly what the Lord needs from us to serve in his kingdom. Our singlehood is the very thing that could unlock someone's heart. Our singlehood could be the thing that gives us the flexibility to serve in ways others cannot. Our singlehood could be the very thing which allows us to connect with others.

Our opportunities to serve are limitless, absolutely limitless. In the approximately 30 years I've had serving as an active adult member of the Church, I've been asked to serve in almost every capacity and in almost every organization there is available to women.

I didn't think of any of my callings as unimportant, or a made-up calling, or an invisible calling. I took every calling I had (including the calling to be a ministering sister) seriously. I served with all my heart, mind, and strength.²²

What did serving in this way do for me? It strengthened my discipleship in Christ and that built connections with the ward members that I was serving and serving with. It gave me a sense of belonging.

There is a never-ending need for willing members to serve. As the song goes, "The Lord has need of helping hands, and hearts that know and feel."²³

Real-life Examples of Single Saints

Let me give some examples of single saints who make a significant difference.

This is Heidi Voegler (*photo not available*). She was serving as my Relief Society President in our family ward when I knew her. After I left the ward, she went on to become the Stake Relief Society President. She has also served as a Youth Sunday School Teacher, Young Women Camp Director, Ward Organist, Primary Teacher, Primary Music Leader, Primary Pianist, and Temple Worker. She also holds two PhDs, two master's degrees, and currently is an Associate Professor here at BYU. She's volunteered for 10 years at a children's music and dance theater, but her favorite calling in life, is as an aunt. All of this, as a single, never married sister.

This is Lorelie Sander. (*photo not available*). She is one of the main reasons you are here today. She, along with a very small but fiercely dedicated team, are the ones responsible for planning and executing BYU Women's Conference, the world's largest conference for women of faith. That means securing all the speakers, coordinating all the events, and managing all the logistics, of an event which attracts 12,000+ women every year (and she's been doing this for 11 years). She has also been a Seminary Teacher, an MTC teacher, an EFY Counselor and Coordinator, and speaks Dutch. She was formerly the Primary President and is now currently serving as a Relief Society President. All of this, as a single, never married sister.

What impact do single saints have on the members of their wards, stakes, and communities?

What impact do single saints have on strengthening testimonies, temple and family history work, and missionary work?

What impact do singles saints have on the lives of the individuals they ministered to, taught, or served?

An infinite and Eternal impact. "For this is my work and my glory, to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."²⁴ This is the work that these single saints are engaged in, and they are doing it tremendously well.

Thus, by strengthening our discipleship of Christ, we can focus on the opportunities the Lord has given us and utilize our unique gifts, life experiences, strengths, and available time to make a significant impact in the lives of others now.

In summary, my central message is that as single members of the Church, by strengthening our discipleship of Jesus Christ, we can experience joy, find peace, make connection, enjoy full participation, and make a significant impact, NOW; and these are not things we wait for until we get married.

Now, I want to close with one final photo. This is a collage of my friends who got married recently (*photo not available*). All of these women were 40 something years old when they got married for the first time. Before getting married, one of them was an adoption therapist for 10 years, another was a director at an eating disorder clinic, and another was a dean of higher education. I could go on and on.

Simultaneously, these women were also busy being Relief Society leaders, Young Women leaders, Gospel Doctrine teachers, Primary teachers, temple workers, ministering sisters, and on and on.

One of them spoke here, at BYU Women's Conference, and another spoke at Education Week. Some of them worked in Washington DC, others have traveled the world.

These single sisters were living their lives to the fullest, in serving God and their fellow man, and when they got married, they were already happy, at peace, connecting, fully participating, and making an impact in the lives of others.

This is the significance that singles can make in Christ's church, and I invite you as a single sister, to walk together with me, and to do the same.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

¹ M. Russell Ballard, "Hope in Christ," April 2021.

² Kristen M. Oaks, "To the Singles of the Church," September 2021.

³ See Alma 34:34.

⁴ See 2 Nephi 2.

⁵ See 2 Nephi 2:10.

⁶ See Helaman 5:12.

⁷ See Moses 2: 26-27.

⁸ Doctrine Covenants 6:36.

⁹ Russell M. Nelson, "Drawing the Power of Jesus Christ into Our Lives," May 2018.

¹⁰ See Mark 14.

¹¹ 3 Nephi 11: 27, 36.

¹² Romans 8: 31.

¹³ D. Todd Christofferson, "The Doctrine of Belonging," November 2022.

¹⁴ See Mark 10:45.

¹⁵ See 3 Nephi 13:25.

¹⁶ See Moses 7:18.

¹⁷ See 3 Nephi 11.

¹⁸ Kristen M. Oaks, "To the Singles of the Church," September 2021.

¹⁹ "About the Temple Endowment," Temples, churchofjesuschrist.org.

²⁰ Henry B. Eyring, "Hearts Bound Together," May 2005.

²¹ See Moroni 10:8.

²² See Doctrine and Covenants 4:2.

²³ Hymn 252.

²⁴ Moses 1:39.