

# Privileges and Responsibilities of Sisters

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*President of the Church*

My dear sisters, the women of the Church, young and older, it is such a privilege to have an opportunity to speak to you in your many different locations and situations around the world. I only wish we could meet all the women of the Church in one large body, but we are grateful that the Lord has blessed us with the technology to make tonight's worldwide assemblies possible. In a way, it is much like the gatherings that used to be held in this historic tabernacle, where all could be sitting together and listening together. I never tire of expressing appreciation for the way in which technology helps us build the kingdom and serve the Saints. In many ways, in spite of the complexities of our growing size, it allows us to keep in touch, perhaps even more adequately than long distances and poor communications did for our pioneer forebears.

This is an unique and significant gathering. Nothing like it has ever been held before in the Church—and so far as I know, in the world.

Yes, there are some wonderful advantages to our modern day. There is much to be joyful about.

May I express appreciation to the sisters in the general presidencies of the Relief Society, the Young Women, and the Primary, who, along with their boards, do so much to serve the sisters of the Church, and have been largely responsible for initiating this coming together here tonight.

This marvelous chorus of young women has set the tone in beautiful song for what we hope and pray for all of you who have come to listen tonight. May the Lord bless them for their beauty of spirit and music.

As one of the few men privileged to be with you in this momentous gathering, I come to you tonight with a message of peace and hope and love, a message of advice and counsel, a message of faith and encouragement and confidence. I trust that what I say will be helpful and beneficial to you.

May I begin with re-emphasizing some everlasting truths. My dear sisters, choose to keep the commandments of God. For men, for women, for young, for old, this is the secret to happiness, here and

hereafter. Keeping them with self-mastery and personal discipline allows the real freedoms that exalt and sustain us. The basic commandments are as simple as they are true: the Ten Commandments as given by God to Moses and the addition to them of what the Savior said—to love the Lord with all your heart, mind, might and strength, and thy neighbor as thyself.

Attend to your personal and family prayers and family devotions. Keep the Sabbath day holy in thought and deed. Live strictly the Word of Wisdom. Attend to all family duties. Keep your life clean and free from all unholy and impure thoughts and actions. Cultivate those associations and activities which will not threaten and lower your high, righteous standards.

Study the scriptures. Thus you may gain strength through the understanding of eternal things. You young women need this close relationship with the mind and will of our Eternal Father. We want our sisters to be scholars of the scriptures as well as our men.

You need an acquaintanceship with his eternal truths for your own well being, and for the purposes of teaching your own children and all others who come within your influence.

Be chaste and do everything in your power to help others to be. Be so absorbed with uplifting, enriching pursuits and pastimes that you leave no room for the negative or the evil that might move in to fill some bored or thoughtless void.

Remember always that the Lord has sanctified some things, and they are not to be forgotten or departed from. They are divine principles which, if adhered to, will make you supremely happy.

The words of all inspired prophets will teach you that violations of the law of chastity are sins in the eyes of your Heavenly Father. It is a transgression to be involved in any illicit sex activity such as fornication or adultery. It is a transgression to become involved in lesbianism or to engage in any lustful activity.

The sexual drives which bind men and women together as one are good and necessary. They make it possible to leave one's parents and cleave unto one another. But here, more than almost any other place, we must exercise self-control. These drives which are the fountainhead of human life are to be allowed expression only in the sanctity of marriage.

Among your most important choices in life should be a temple marriage. Honorable, happy, and successful marriage is surely the goal of every person. One who would purposely or neglectfully avoid its serious implication is frustrating her own eternal program.

Marriage is perhaps the most vital of all the decisions and has the most far-reaching effects, for it has to do not only with immediate happiness, but eternal joys as well.

In selecting one's companion for life and for eternity, certainly the most careful planning and thinking and praying and fasting should be done *to be sure that of all the decisions, this one is not wrong*. In a true marriage there must be a union of minds as well as of hearts. Emotions must not wholly determine decisions, but the mind and the heart, strengthened by fasting and prayer and serious consideration, will give one a maximum chance of marital happiness.

Some young people think of happiness as a glamorous life of ease, luxury, and constant thrills, but true marriage is based on happiness that is more than that, one that comes from giving, serving, sharing, sacrificing, and selflessness.

You can set your goals, young women, to make you reach and strain. Keep striving for them. Be prayerful and humble in seeking wisdom and knowledge. You are in the time of your life for studying and preparing. Learn all you can. Growth comes from setting your goals high and reaching for the stars.

Now, the General Authorities are very much aware of the fact that many of our sisters are widows. Others have become divorced. Still others have never had the privilege of temple marriage. We want all such sisters to understand that when we speak of family life, it is not done to make them feel sad or unappreciated. The leaders of the Church have said often, and clearly, that women in such circumstances include some of the most noble spirits of our Father in Heaven. Those who make the best of what life has given to them will be rewarded for all that they have done in the service of our Heavenly Father and their fellowman.

Those of you who do not now experience the traditional women's role, not by choice, but for reasons beyond control, can still do so much to help others. Your talents and time must not be misused simply because all of the preferred ways of sharing and giving are not open to you presently.

The Lord knows, too, that through circumstances beyond their control, some mothers are faced with the added responsibility of earning a living. These women have God's blessings for he knows of their anguish and their struggle.

The Church will always hold aloft the banner of happy family life, for we can do no other! Family life is the best method for achieving happiness in this world, and it is a clear pattern given to us from the Lord about what is to be in the next world.

We have no choice, dear sisters, but to continue to hold up the ideal of the Latter-day Saint family. The fact that some do not now have the privilege of living in such a family is not reason enough to stop talking about it. We do discuss family life with sensitivity, however, realizing that many sisters do not presently have the privilege of belonging or contributing to such a family. But we cannot set aside this standard, because so many other things depend upon it.

Young women should plan and prepare for marriage and the bearing and rearing of children. It is your divine right and the avenue to the greatest and most supreme happiness. You should also make choices looking forward to productive use of your time once the children are grown and gone from under your wing. You should seek for ways to bless the lives of all with whom you associate. You should know the truth of all things. You should be prepared to help build the kingdom of God.

You may answer that finding a husband is not within the power of a young woman. The man has the choice. To the extent that that is true, remember that what the Lord expects of each of his daughters is that she seek out those opportunities and make those choices which will keep her worthy of living again with him. Then she will be prepared for marriage.

There is a great and grand principle involved here. Just as those who do not hear the gospel in this life, but who would have received it with all their hearts had they heard it, will be given the fulness of the gospel blessings in the next world—so, too, the women of the Church who do not in this life have the privileges and blessings of a temple marriage, through no fault of their own, who would have responded if they had an appropriate opportunity—will receive all those blessings in the world to come. We desire all you sisters to know how much we love and appreciate you. We respect you for your valiant and devoted service, and have many opportunities to observe how dedicated you are!

When I think of the women of the Church, I think of my own beloved Camilla and how greatly our family has been blessed because of her talents and leadership. What makes her—and literally millions of others of you like her—so trustworthy and so trusting? I think there are some realities to look at.

For one thing, Mormon women are basically strong, independent, and faithful. They have chosen to live by a creed and a way of life that can be demanding at best. From the earliest days of the Church, active membership has meant faith, fortitude, denial, selflessness, and good service.

All Church programs are designed to assist us, whether we are men or women, in becoming better Latter-day Saints. All Church programs are designed to bring us closer to our Heavenly Father and live lives more like that of his perfect son, Jesus Christ.

The great women of the kingdom have often been uprooted with their husbands and families and have been moved hither and yon, yet they never worried about God's forgetting them, because they worshipped a God who governs the galaxies but who, in the midst of such vastness, continues to love each of his children perfectly, individually, and constantly.

Each of you should be grateful to be a woman! Self-pity is always a sad thing to see and especially when there is no justification for it. To be a righteous woman is a glorious thing in any age. To be a righteous woman during the winding up scenes on this earth, before the second coming of our Savior, is an especially noble calling. The righteous woman's strength and influence today can be tenfold what it might be in more tranquil times. She has been placed here to help to enrich, to protect, and to guard the home—which is society's basic and most noble institution. Other institutions in society may falter and even fail, but the righteous woman can help to save the home, which may be the last and only sanctuary some mortals know in the midst of storm and strife.

One of the important messages that emerges from the history of great women in all ages is that they cared more for the future of their families than for their own comfort. Such good women had a grasp of what matters in life. When called upon to do so, they could fashion a lovely city in the midst of a swamp or make the desert blossom as a rose.

Selflessness is a key to happiness and effectiveness; it is precious and must be preserved as a virtue which guarantees so many other virtues. There are so many things in the world which reinforce our natural selfishness, and neither our men nor women should be partakers thereof. We have grown strong as a people because our mothers and our women have been so selfless. That ennobling quality must not be lost, even though some of the people of the world may try to persuade otherwise.

While there is much variety in the circumstances in which the women of the Church find themselves, they still have much more in common with each other than with other groups. Let us be conscious of doctrines which preach unity but which end up dividing. We hope our women as well as our men will be conscious of the philosophies of the world which would attempt to reverse the wisdom of the Lord when he told us that we can find ourselves only by losing ourselves.

There is a constant need to develop and to maintain tenderness. The world's ways harden us. The tenderness of our women is directly linked to the tenderness of our children. The women of the Church do so much to teach our sons and daughters and to prepare the rising generation. Let us make no mistake about it—the home is the seedbed of Saints! Both sin and selfishness destroy our spiritual sensitivity.

I am grateful for the way in which our sisters are encouraged to perform acts of Christian service as a result of their affiliation with Relief Society and other Church organizations. I hope our young women of the Church will establish early in their lives a habit of Christian service. When we help other people with their problems, it puts ours in fresh perspective. We encourage the sisters of the Church—young and older—to be “anxiously engaged” in quiet acts of service for friends and neighbors. Every principle of the gospel carries within itself its own witness that it is true. So it is that acts of service help not only the beneficiaries of the service, but they enlarge the giver.

As one reads the Sermon on the Mount, therein the Savior extolled, among other things, meekness, mercy, peacemaking, and the capacity to cope with persecution and misunderstanding.

Women display a remarkable capacity to love, to cope, along with a remarkable empathy for others in difficulty, which moves women to service as they express their goodness quietly. Women, so often, are charity personified.

It is true of all of us that, as we progress spiritually, our sense of belonging, identity, and self-worth increases. Let us create a climate in which we encourage the sisters of the Church to have a program of personal improvement. It ought to be a practical and realistic program, which is determined personally and not imposed upon them. Yet it ought to cause them to reach for new levels of achievement. We are not asking for something spectacular but rather for the women of the Church to find real self-fulfillment through wise self-development in the pursuit of righteous and worthy endeavors.

We should be as concerned with the woman's capacity to communicate as we are to have her sew and preserve food. Good women are articulate as well as affectionate. One skill or one attribute need not be developed at the expense of another. Symmetry in our spiritual development is much to be desired. We are as anxious for women to be as wise in the management of their time as we are for women to be wise stewards of the family's storehouse of food.

We know that women who have deep appreciation for the past will be concerned about shaping a righteous future. We desire women to develop social refinements because these are very real dimensions of

keeping the second great commandment—to love one’s neighbor as oneself. We know that women who will improve their relationships with the Father in Heaven will also improve their relationships with their neighbors.

The women of God in all ages have been able to reflect with awe upon the handiwork of God in the heavens without neglecting the practical skills needed not only to survive on this planet but to live an abundant life. There is more of a connection than many realize between the order and purpose of the universe and the order and harmony which exists in a happy and good family.

I am grateful for the cultural refinement that comes into Latter-day Saint homes as the mothers are able to draw upon their experiences in the Church to add to the serenity of our homes. Especially is this true if we approach these things in the spirit of the thirteenth Article of Faith: “If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.” [A of F 1:13]

The cultivation of Christlike qualities is a demanding and relentless task—it is not for the seasonal worker or for those who will not stretch themselves, again and again.

Each of you sisters has the right and the responsibility to direct your own life. But be not deceived; you must also be responsible for your choices. This is an eternal principle. The law of the harvest is ever in evidence.

We speak often of agency—free agency. Surely it is what brought you here tonight.

Agency suggests something very important—trust. Trust on the part of all. Now, just as God trusted us with all he had created here on earth, we must trust his knowledge and love and each other.

God is the same, yesterday, today, and forever, as are his purposes. It is written: “And I, God, created man in mine own image, in the image of mine Only Begotten created I him; male and female created I them” (Moses 2:27).

And Genesis goes on to say something very beautiful about that creation:

“And God blessed them. ...

“And God said, Behold, I have given you ... every thing ... upon the earth, wherein there is life, ... and it was so.

“And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.” (Gen. 1:28–31.)

This is a partnership. God and his creation. The Primary song says, “I am a child of God.” Born with a noble birthright. God is your father. He loves you. He and your mother in heaven value you beyond any measure. They gave your eternal intelligence spirit form, just as your earthly mother and father have given you a mortal body. You are unique. One of a kind, made of the eternal intelligence which gives you claim upon eternal life.

Let there be no question in your mind about your value as an individual. The whole intent of the gospel plan is to provide an opportunity for each of you to reach your fullest potential, which is eternal progression and the possibility of godhood.

May you realize that in you is the control of your life and what you are going to be, what you are going to do. Remember that your choices may control to some extent others whose lives will be a part of your life. Remember also that if you succeed, it isn't because of luck. Success comes from faith and work and prayer and from constant righteous effort. It is a question of agency—of what you choose to do with gifts of God—everything upon the earth, wherein there is life. This reverence for agency and life make us greatly concerned about the world in which we live today. It is a world beset with evil, with frustrations, with ugliness. It makes us realize that we must make a strong stand for the right or we may not stand at all.

The Lord has never promised us that we will be free of problems and challenges. He has, however, promised that with faith we will have the strength to meet any eventuality in this life.

Being “anxiously engaged” in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can provide for any of you in any circumstance some reasons to hope—even to be glad and certainly to be loved.

Home is a place for all that is good and enlightening and true. It should provide a climate for constant growth and learning for all who live there—father, mother, and children. Whether or not it provides such a climate depends upon each individual concerned making the right choices in life.

It is against the home and family life that Satan has aimed his greatest efforts to destroy. He strikes the moral sanctity of the home. It is labeled “a new morality” in which freedom of sexual relations is proclaimed. It seeks destruction of the faithfulness and fidelity of husband and wife in the face of the Lord's commandment, “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Ex. 20:14).

I would have you lovely sisters understand that there is no new morality. That the Church's stand on morality may be understood, we declare



firmly and unalterably that morality is *not* an outworn garment, faded, old-fashioned, or threadbare.

As you make your life's choices, understand well, my dear sisters, that God is unchanging, and his covenants and doctrines are not susceptible to change. When the sun grows cold and the stars no longer shine, the law of chastity will still be basic in God's world and in the Lord's church. Old values are not upheld by the Church because they are old, but rather because through the ages they have proved to be right and because God has thus spoken.

The law of chastity requires total abstinence before marriage and full fidelity afterward. It is the same for men and women. It is the cornerstone of trust so necessary to the precious happiness of the marriage relationship and family solidarity.

Satan makes yet another powerful effort, and that is an attempt to destroy the happiness and sanctity of God-ordained family life. It is divorce, with all its destructive forces, including heartaches, suffering, sorrow, and often disastrous results. We have often discussed the sadness and disappointments and sorrows of divorce. We can hardly emphasize it too much.

No matter what you read or hear, no matter what the differences of circumstances you observe in the lives of women about you, it is important for you Latter-day Saint women to understand that the Lord holds motherhood and mothers sacred and in the highest esteem. He has entrusted to his daughters the great responsibility of bearing and nurturing children.

This is the great, irreplaceable work of women. Life cannot go on if women cease to bear children. Mortal life is a privilege and a necessary step in eternal progression. Mother Eve understood that. You must also understand it.

It was never easy to bear and rear children, but easy things do not make for growth and development. Loud, blatant voices today shout, "Fewer children," and offer the pill, surgery, and even ugly abortion, which has reached monumental numbers. It is an awful thing when mothers without righteous cause take the lives or participate in the taking of the lives of their unborn children.

Much is said about the drudgery and the confinement of the woman's role in the home. In the perspective of the gospel it is not so. There is divinity in each new life. There is challenge in creating the environment in which a child can grow and develop. There is partnership between the man and woman in building a family which can last throughout the eternities.

Marriage is a partnership. Each is given a part of the work of life to do. The fact that some women and men disregard their work and their opportunities does not change the program.

When we speak of marriage as a partnership, let us speak of marriage as *a full* partnership. We do not want our LDS women to be *silent* partners or *limited* partners in that eternal assignment! Please be a *contributing* and *full* partner.

Mothers have a sacred role. They are partners with God, as well as with their own husbands, first in giving birth to the Lord's spirit children and then in rearing those children so they will serve the Lord and keep his commandments. Could there be a more sacred trust than to be a trustee for honorable, well-born, well-developed children? We reaffirm the Church's strong, unalterable stand against innovations or any unchastity or breaking of the laws that could possibly reflect in the lives of the children.

Of these matters I have spoken to you plainly tonight because we are greatly concerned about the trends of the day which bring many serious problems and require the making of the important choices as true daughters of God.

Never let it be said that you did not understand. Please think on these things. Pray about them, for surely I have. Prepare for and live as full a life as can be your privilege.

We thank the sisters of the Church, young and older, for being such great defenders of the Church, in word and in deed. We love you and respect you!

As Moroni quoted to Joseph Smith from the Prophet Joel, so I quote to you:

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your *daughters* shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions:

“And also upon the servants and upon the *handmaids* in those days will I pour out my spirit.” (Joel 2:28–29; italics added.)

May the Lord bless you and your loved ones this day and always, I humbly pray, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.