

Three Goals to Guide You

By President Thomas S. Monson
First Counselor in the First Presidency

Your influence ranges far beyond yourself and your home and touches others all around the globe.

This evening our souls have reached toward heaven. We have been blessed with beautiful music and inspired messages. The Spirit of the Lord is here.

Sisters Julie Beck, Silvia Allred, Barbara Thompson—thank heaven for your dear mothers and fathers, your teachers, your youth leaders, and others who recognized in you your potential.

To paraphrase a thought:

*You never know what a girl is worth,
 You'll have to wait and see;
 But every woman in a noble place,
 A girl once used to be.*¹

It is a great privilege for me to be with you. I recognize that beyond you who are gathered in the Conference Center, there are many thousands watching and listening to the proceedings by way of satellite transmission.

As I speak to you, I realize that as a man I am in the minority and must be cautious in my comments. I'm reminded of the man who walked into a bookstore and asked the clerk—a woman—for help: "Have you got a book titled *Man, the Master of Women*?" The clerk looked him straight in the eye and said sarcastically, "Try the fiction section!"

I assure you tonight that I honor you, the women of the Church, and am well aware, to quote William R. Wallace, that "the hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world."²

In 1901 President Lorenzo Snow said: "The members of the Relief Society have ... ministered to those in affliction, they have thrown their arms of love around the fatherless and the widows, and they have kept themselves unspotted from the world. I can testify that there are no purer and more God-fearing women in the world than are to be found within the ranks of the Relief Society."³

As in President Snow's time, there are, here and now, visits to be made, greetings to be shared, and hungry souls to be fed. As I contemplate the Relief Society of today, humbled by my privilege to speak to you, I turn to our Heavenly Father for His divine guidance.

In this spirit, I have felt to provide each member of the Relief Society throughout the world three goals to meet:

1. **Study diligently.**
2. **Pray earnestly.**
3. **Serve willingly.**

Let us consider each of these goals. First, **study diligently**. The Savior of the world instructed: "Seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith."⁴ He added: "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."⁵

A study of the scriptures will help our testimonies and the testimonies of our family members. Our children today are growing up surrounded by voices urging them to abandon that which is right and to pursue, instead, the pleasures of the world. Unless they have a firm foundation in the gospel of Jesus Christ, a testimony of the truth, and a determination to live righteously, they are susceptible to these influences. It is our responsibility to fortify and protect them.

To an alarming extent, our children today are being educated by the media, including the Internet. In the United States, it is reported that the average child watches approximately four hours of television daily, much of the programming being filled with violence, alcohol and drug use, and sexual content. Watching movies and playing video games is in addition to the four hours.⁶ And the statistics are much the same for other developed countries. The messages portrayed on television, in movies, and in other media are very often in direct opposition to that which we want our children to embrace and hold dear. It is our responsibility not only to teach them to be sound in spirit and doctrine but also to help them stay that way, regardless of the outside forces they may encounter. This will require much time and effort on our part—and in order to help others, we ourselves need the spiritual and moral courage to withstand the evil we see on every side.

We live in the time spoken of in 2 Nephi, chapter 9:

"O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of

themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish.

“But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God.”⁷

Required is the courage to hold fast to our standards despite the derision of the world. Said President J. Reuben Clark Jr., for many years a member of the First Presidency: “Not unknown are cases where [those] of presumed faith ... have felt that, since by affirming their full faith they might call down upon themselves the ridicule of their unbelieving colleagues, they must either modify or explain away their faith or destructively dilute it, or even pretend to cast it away. Such are hypocrites.”⁸

There comes to mind the powerful verses found in 2 Timothy, in the New Testament, chapter 1, verses 7 and 8:

“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

“Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord.”

Beyond our study of spiritual matters, secular learning is also essential. Often the future is unknown; therefore, it behooves us to prepare for uncertainties. Statistics reveal that at some time, because of the illness or death of a husband or because of economic necessity, you may find yourself in the role of financial provider. Some of you already occupy that role. I urge you to pursue your education—if you are not already doing so or have not done so—that you might be prepared to provide if circumstances necessitate such.

Your talents will expand as you study and learn. You will be able to better assist your families in their learning, and you will have peace of mind in knowing that you have prepared yourself for the eventualities that you may encounter in life.

I reiterate: **Study diligently.**

The second goal I wish to mention: **Pray earnestly.** The Lord directed, “Pray always, and I will pour out my Spirit upon you, and great shall be your blessing.”⁹

Perhaps there has never been a time when we had greater need to pray and to teach our family members to pray. Prayer is a defense against temptation. It is through earnest and heartfelt prayer that we can receive the needed blessings and the support required to make our way in this sometimes difficult and challenging journey we call mortality.

We can teach the importance of prayer to our children and grandchildren both by word and by example. I share with you a lesson

in teaching by example as described in a mother's letter to me relating to prayer. "Dear President Monson: Sometimes I wonder if I make a difference in my children's lives. Especially as a single mother working two jobs to make ends meet, I sometimes come home to confusion, but I never give up hope."

Her letter continues as she describes how she and her children were watching general conference, where I was speaking about prayer. Her son made the comment, "Mother, you've already taught us that." She asked, "What do you mean?" Her son replied, "Well, you've taught us to pray and showed us how, but the other night I came to your room to ask something and found you on your knees praying to Heavenly Father. If He's important to you, He'll be important to me." The letter concluded, "I guess you never know what kind of influence you'll be until a child observes you doing yourself what you have tried to teach him to do."

Some years ago, just before leaving Salt Lake to attend the annual meetings of Boy Scouts of America in Atlanta, Georgia, I decided to take with me enough copies of the *New Era* so that I might share with Scouting officials this excellent publication. When I arrived at the hotel in Atlanta, I opened the package of magazines. I found that my secretary, for no accountable reason, had put in the package two extra copies of the June issue, an issue that featured temple marriage. I left the two copies in the hotel room and, as planned, distributed the other copies.

On the final day of meetings, I had no desire to attend the scheduled luncheon but felt compelled to return to my room. The telephone was ringing as I entered. The caller was a member of the Church who had heard I was in Atlanta. She introduced herself and asked if I could provide a blessing for her 10-year-old daughter. I agreed readily, and she indicated that she and her husband, their daughter, and their son would come immediately to my hotel room. As I waited, I prayed for help. The applause of the convention was replaced by the feelings of peace which accompanied prayer.

Then came the knock at the door and the privilege which was mine to meet a choice family. The 10-year-old daughter walked with the aid of crutches. Cancer had required the amputation of her left leg; however, her countenance was radiant, her trust in God unwavering. A blessing was provided. Mother and son knelt by the side of the bed while the father and I placed our hands on the tiny daughter. We were directed by the Spirit of God. We were humbled by its power.

I felt the tears course down my cheeks and tumble upon my hands as they rested on the head of that beautiful child of God. I spoke of eternal ordinances and family exaltation. The Lord prompted me to

urge this family to enter the holy temple of God. At the conclusion of the blessing, I learned that such a temple visit was planned. Questions pertaining to the temple were asked. I heard no heavenly voice, nor did I see a vision. Yet there came clearly into my mind the words, “Refer to the *New Era*.” I looked toward the dresser, and there were the two extra copies of the temple issue of the *New Era*. One copy was given to the daughter and the other to her parents. We reviewed them together.

The family said farewell, and once again the room was still. A prayer of gratitude came easily and, once more, the resolve to ever provide a place for prayer.

My dear sisters, do not pray for tasks equal to your abilities, but pray for abilities equal to your tasks. Then the performance of your tasks will be no miracle, but you will be the miracle.

Pray earnestly.

Finally, **serve willingly**. You are a mighty force for good, one of the most powerful in the entire world. Your influence ranges far beyond yourself and your home and touches others all around the globe. You have reached out to your brothers and sisters across streets, across cities, across nations, across continents, across oceans. You personify the Relief Society motto: “Charity never faileth.”

You are, of course, surrounded by opportunities for service. No doubt at times you recognize so many such opportunities that you may feel somewhat overwhelmed. Where do you begin? How can you do it all? How do you choose, from all the needs you observe, where and how to serve?

Often small acts of service are all that is required to lift and bless another: a question concerning a person’s family, quick words of encouragement, a sincere compliment, a small note of thanks, a brief telephone call. If we are observant and aware, and if we act on the promptings which come to us, we can accomplish much good. Sometimes, of course, more is needed.

I learned recently of loving service given to a mother when her children were very young. Frequently she would be up in the middle of the night tending to the needs of her little ones, as mothers do. Often her friend and neighbor across the street would come over the next day and say, “I saw your lights on in the middle of the night and know you were up with the children. I’m going to take them to my house for a couple of hours while you take a nap.” Said this grateful mother: “I was so thankful for her welcome offer, it wasn’t until this had happened many times that I realized if she had seen my lights on in the middle of the night, she was up with one of her children as well and needed a nap just

as much as I did. She taught me a great lesson, and I've since tried to be as observant as she was in looking for opportunities to serve others."

Countless are the acts of service provided by the vast army of Relief Society visiting teachers. A few years ago I heard of two of them who aided a grieving widow, Angela, the granddaughter of a cousin of mine. Angela's husband and a friend of his had gone snowmobiling and had become victims of suffocation through a snowslide. Each of them left a pregnant wife—in Angela's case, their first child, and in the other case, a wife not only expecting a child but also the mother of a toddler. In the funeral held for Angela's husband, the bishop reported that upon hearing of the tragic accident, he had gone immediately to Angela's home. Almost as soon as he arrived, the doorbell sounded. The door was opened, and there stood Angela's two visiting teachers. The bishop said he watched as they so sincerely expressed to Angela their love and compassion. The three women cried together, and it was apparent that these two fine visiting teachers cared deeply about Angela. As perhaps only women can, they gently indicated—without being asked—exactly what help they would be providing. That they would be close by as long as Angela needed them was obvious. The bishop expressed his deep gratitude in knowing they would be a real source of comfort to her in the days ahead.

Such acts of love and compassion are repeated again and again by the wonderful visiting teachers of this Church—not always in such dramatic situations but just as genuinely, nevertheless.

I extol you who, with loving care and compassionate concern, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and house the homeless. He who notes the sparrow's fall will not be unmindful of such service. The desire to lift, the willingness to help, and the graciousness to give come from a heart filled with love. **Serve willingly.**

Our beloved prophet, even President Gordon B. Hinckley, said of you, "God planted within women something divine that expresses itself in quiet strength, in refinement, in peace, in goodness, in virtue, in truth, in love."¹⁰

My dear sisters, may our Heavenly Father bless each of you, married or single, in your homes, in your families, in your very lives—that you may merit the glorious salutation of the Savior of the World: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant"¹¹ I pray, as I bless you and also the dear wife of James E. Faust, his beloved Ruth, who is here tonight on the front row, and their family, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See “Nobody Knows What a Boy Is Worth,” in *Best-Loved Poems of the LDS People*, ed. Jack M. Lyon and others (1996), 19.
2. “The Hand That Rocks the Cradle Is the Hand That Rules the World,” in *The World’s Best-Loved Poems*, comp. James Gilchrist Lawson (1955), 242.
3. *The Teachings of Lorenzo Snow*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (1984), 143.
4. D&C 88:118.
5. John 5:39.
6. American Academy of Pediatrics, “Television and the Family,” 1, www.aap.org/family/tv1.htm.
7. 2 Nephi 9:28–29.
8. “The Charted Course of the Church in Education” (address delivered at the Summer Institute of Seminary, Institute, and Church School Teachers at Aspen Grove, Aug. 8, 1938), in James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (1965–75), 6:52.
9. D&C 19:38.
10. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (1997), 387.
11. Matthew 25:21.