

Lessons from Eve

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Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

President and Sister Benson, I hope you can feel the love and spirit emanating from the thousands of sisters at this General Women's Meeting. President Hinckley and President Monson, we extend our love to you and your companions. The attendance of members of the First Presidency symbolizes their support for each of us. On their behalf, I extend their gratitude and love to all of you.

I deeply appreciate the invocation and the messages delivered by the General Presidency of the Relief Society and by this wonderful women's chorus.

Sister Doxey has recounted the privilege that each of us has to strengthen the family—the basic component of society, and the fundamental unit of the Church. The family is provided in God's plan to nurture his children and prepare them to return to him—as families.

Sister Evans has helped us understand that the human race doesn't run on a smooth track. The route more closely resembles an obstacle course with hurdles, puddles, or snares lurking around every turn we make. Life isn't meant to be easy. The race isn't to be won by the swift or the flashy. Victory comes only to those who muster the faith to stay on the track—the strait and narrow way.

Sister Winder has put our purpose in perspective. She has taught an eternal truth —“Men are, that they might have joy” (2 Ne. 2:25). And she has emphasized one of the means by which true joy is realized: rendering selfless service of worth to others.

As the male participant tonight, I bear a great responsibility to convey deep feelings of gratitude. For the men of the Church, I say thank you!

Not only do I express gratitude, but our affection as well. Represented in this vast audience are our dear companions, our mothers, our sisters, our daughters, and our granddaughters. We respect and honor you. We support your wonderful efforts. We are grateful to receive the benefit of your counsel and insights in challenges we share as partners. And we thank you as mothers or potential mothers for your partnership with God in providing life. Without women, the whole purpose of the creation of this world would be in vain.

This truth we learn from scriptures about the priesthood, the Creation, Adam and Eve.

Before the world was formed, the Lord Jesus Christ was Jehovah, “the Great I Am ... the beginning and the end, ... [who] looked upon the wide expanse of eternity, and all the seraphic hosts of heaven” (D&C 38:1; see also D&C 29:1; D&C 39:1).

He told Abraham, having first shown him “the intelligences that were organized before the world was; among all these there were many of the noble and great ones;

“And God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers” (Abr. 3:22–23).

The Lord then revealed that Abraham was one of them, chosen and foreordained before he was born.

Scriptural verse then continues:

“There stood one among them that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him: We will go down, ... and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell” (Abr. 3:24).

Then “the Gods, organized and formed the heavens and the earth” (Abr. 4:1).

You will recall that after the earth had been created, divided, beautified, and inhabited with plant and animal life, the crowning achievement of the Creation was to be man—the human being. “So the Gods went down to organize man in their own image, ... male and female to form they them” (Abr. 4:27; see also Gen. 1:26).

The very purpose of creation was to provide bodies, to enable these eagerly awaiting spirits to enjoy mortal life and experiences.

Question: What was the role of the priesthood in the process of creation?

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught:

“The Priesthood is an everlasting principle, and existed with God from eternity. ... Christ is the Great High Priest; Adam next” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938, pp. 157–58).

“The priesthood was first given to Adam; he obtained the First Presidency, and held the keys of it from generation to generation. He obtained it in the Creation, before the world was formed” (*Teachings*, p. 157).

President Brigham Young said, “Priesthood ... is the law by which the worlds are, were, and will continue for ever and ever” (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1941, p. 130).

Thus, priesthood is the power of God. Its ordinances and covenants are to bless men and women alike. By that power, the earth was created. Under the direction of the Father, Jehovah was the creator. As Michael, Adam did his part. He became the first man. But, in spite of the power and glory of creation to that point, the final link in the chain of creation was still missing. All the purposes of the world and all that was in the world would be brought to naught without woman—a keystone in the priesthood arch of creation.

When Eve was created—when her body was made by God—Adam exclaimed, “Bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man” (Moses 3:23).

From the rib of Adam, Eve was formed (see Gen. 2:22; Moses 3:22; Abr. 5:16).

Interesting to me is the fact that animals fashioned by our Creator, such as dogs and cats, have thirteen pairs of ribs, but the human being has one less with only

twelve. I presume another bone could have been used, but the rib, coming as it does from the side, seems to denote partnership. The rib signifies neither dominion nor subservience, but a lateral relationship as partners, to work and to live, side by side.

Adam and Eve were joined together in marriage for time and for all eternity by the power of that everlasting priesthood (see Gen. 2:24–25; Moses 3:25; Abr. 5:18–19). Eve came as a partner, to build and to organize the bodies of mortal men. She was designed by Deity to cocreate and nurture life, that the great plan of the Father might achieve fruition. Eve “was the mother of all living” (Moses 4:26). She was the first of all women.

From our study of Eve, we may learn five fundamental lessons of everlasting importance:

1. She labored beside her companion (see Moses 5:1).
2. She and Adam bore the responsibilities of parenthood (see Moses 5:2).
3. She and her partner worshipped the Lord in prayer (see Moses 5:4).
4. She and Adam heeded divine commandments of obedience and sacrifice (see Moses 5:5, 6).
5. She and her husband taught the gospel to their children (see Moses 5:12).

From these five fundamental lessons, we can study patterns which apply to present-day circumstances. Let us review them, lesson by lesson.

1. **She labored beside her companion.** Adam held the priesthood. Eve served in matriarchal partnership with the patriarchal priesthood. So today, each wife may join with her husband as a partner unified in purpose. Scriptures state clearly, “Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord” (1 Cor. 11:11). “They twain shall be one flesh” (Matt. 19:6; Mark 10:8; D&C 49:16). Marvelously, it takes a man *and* a woman to make a man *or* a woman. Without union of the sexes, neither can we exist, nor can we become perfect. Ordinary and imperfect people can build each other through their wholeness together. The complete contribution of one partner to the other is essential to exaltation. This is so “that the earth might answer the end of its creation” (D&C 49:16).

So labor and love in partnership. Honor your companion. Any sense of competition for place or position is not appropriate for either partner, especially when enlightened by scriptural understanding.

2. **As Adam bore responsibilities of fatherhood, so Eve bore the responsibilities of motherhood.** She did not shirk them. So with welcome arms you may gratefully greet those children God may send, through your divine design as cocreator. With your husband, be obedient to the commandment to multiply and replenish the earth, as your opportunity, your spiritual guidance, your wisdom, and your health allow. You will gain joy and rejoicing in your posterity. That enrichment becomes more beautiful and precious with each passing year.

For you childless sisters and those without companions, remember the eternal timetable of the Lord is much longer than the lonely hours of your preparation or the total of this mortal life. These are only as microseconds when compared to eternity. Your willingness and worthiness are surely known to Him. The spiritual rewards of motherhood are available to all women. Nurturing the young, comforting the frightened, protecting the vulnerable, teaching and giving encouragement need not—and should not—be limited to our own children.

Sisters, be patient. I know something of the pressures you feel. Your kitchens are too small. Your budgets are too tight. Demands upon you exceed your capacity to help all who cry out to you. Through it all, “Improve the shining moments; Don’t let them pass you by” (*Hymns*, 1985, no. 226). Take time for spiritual regeneration.

I’ll share a few lines that have sustained Sister Nelson through the years. They also reflect her sense of priority:

*Cleaning and scrubbing can wait 'til tomorrow.
For babies grow up,
We've learned to our sorrow.
So quiet down, cobwebs.
Dust, go to sleep.
I'm rocking my baby,
And babies don't keep.*

I’m glad Sister Nelson has not tried to be a “supermom.” But she has been a “soothing” mom. This she has done simply by being herself.

When priorities are in place, one can more patiently tolerate unfinished business.

“Time flies on wings of lightning; We cannot call it back” (*Hymns*, 1985, no. 226). And while it passes, remember the precious eternal perspective. As you faithfully endure to the end, you will gain rewards promised by your Father in Heaven. They include thrones, kingdoms, principalities, powers, dominions, glory, immortality, and eternal lives (see D&C 75:5; D&C 128:12, 13; D&C 132:19, 24; Moses 1:39).

3. **Eve and her partner worshipped the Lord in prayer.** As “Adam and Eve ... called upon the name of the Lord” (Moses 5:4), a precedent was established. As each of us follows that pattern of prayer, blessings of wisdom and personal peace will ensue.

“Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good” (Alma 37:37). Pray alone in your closet—in the solitude of your own sanctuary. Pour out the longings of your soul. Then pray with and for your husband, your sons and daughters, your sister and brother, your mother and father and all in your family. Let the weight of your innocence be felt as you lovingly motivate others to good works. With your mind so attuned to the Lord and his power, your influence for good becomes immeasurably great. And in this world of sin and temptation, the power of prayer will protect you and be a shield for your loved ones.

I plead with the women of the Church to accept individual responsibility to know and to love the Lord. Communicate with him. He will impress upon your mind inspiration and personal revelation to give you strength.

4. **Eve and her husband heeded divine commandments of obedience and sacrifice.** They received “commandments, that they should worship the Lord their God, and should offer ... an offering unto the Lord” (Moses 5:5).

This direction to worship and sacrifice was obeyed by Adam and Eve. Later they learned that this was “a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth” (Moses 5:7).

When Christ came to the earth, he fulfilled the promised role as he became the ultimate sacrificial lamb. His atonement brought about a greater destiny and a nobler concept for us. We are still commanded to sacrifice, but not by shedding blood of animals. Our highest sense of sacrifice is achieved as we make ourselves more sacred or holy.

This we do by our obedience to the commandments of God. Thus, the laws of obedience and sacrifice are indelibly intertwined. Consider the commandments to obey the Word of Wisdom, to keep the Sabbath day holy, to pay an honest tithe. As we comply with these and other commandments, something wonderful happens to us. We become disciplined! We become disciples! We become more sacred and holy—like our Lord!

I pay tribute to beloved ladies in my life who have taught sanctifying lessons to me.

For a short time during the first year of our marriage, Sister Nelson maintained two jobs while I was in medical school. Before her paychecks had arrived, we found ourselves owing more than our funds could defray. So we took advantage of an option then available to sell blood at \$25 a pint. In an interval between her daytime job as a schoolteacher and her evening work as a clerk in a music store, we went to the hospital and each sold a pint of blood. As the needle was withdrawn from her arm, she said to me, “Don’t forget to pay tithing on my blood money.” (When her mother learned I was bleeding her daughter between two jobs, I sensed at that time she may not have been too pleased with her new son-in-law.) Such obedience was a tremendous lesson to me. Sister Nelson’s commitment to tithe became my commitment, too.

You righteous daughters, never underestimate the influence for good you can exert upon your fathers. I haven’t met a father yet who claimed to be perfect. So in his imperfection, stand steadfast in loving patience with your dad. Let me illustrate this point with a personal story.

Many years ago when our daughters were very young, Sister Nelson and I took them fishing. We were having a wonderful time. Everyone was catching fish. Then shades of Saturday night’s darkness brought a curfew to our fun. So great was my enthusiasm for our success, I allowed myself to rationalize aloud with the girls. (Rationalization is one of the real obstacles to obedience.) Knowing that the next day was Sunday, I jokingly said, “If we get up tomorrow two hours earlier than normal, we could catch some more fish and then quit promptly at our usual wake-up hour.”

Silence followed. My companion and our daughters all glared at me. Icy stillness was broken when our seven-year-old said, “Daddy, would you eat those fish you caught on Sunday?”

Then she added, “Would you ask Heavenly Father to bless fish you caught on the Sabbath?”

Needless to say, we did no fishing the next morning.

Their commitment to the Sabbath became my commitment, too.

So it is, dear daughters. As you obey each of God’s commandments, your holiness will fortify the foundation of your fathers’ faith. When the two of you are together spiritually, one plus one is clearly greater than two.

5. **Adam and Eve taught the gospel to their children.** Today, men and women still have that worthy work to do. But before you can teach, you must first learn of your premortal existence, the Creation, the Fall, the atonement of Christ, and the reason for mortality. Study the scriptures and internalize them. Teach faith, repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Then let your commitment to the mission of the Church be evident in all you do. Preaching the gospel, perfecting the Saints, and redeeming members of your family will cause you to concentrate on covenants and ordinances of eternal significance.

As you exercise your agency, teach things that are elevating and useful. Teach the principles of honesty, self-reliance, avoidance of unnecessary debt. You will build a more stable society by so doing. And remember your example. What you are is more important than what you do or what you say.

We can’t all do all things. Circumstances, available time, and talents vary widely among us. Your diversities take you to numerous arenas of activity. There let your presence be felt.

Your foes in a sordid society demean the sacredness of women and the sanctity of motherhood. Your world, sickened by unchastity and plagued with sexually transmitted disease, needs your righteous example. For the wrath of God is provoked by governments that sponsor gambling, condone pornography, or legalize abortion. These forces serve to denigrate women now, just as they did in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah.

You can—you must—make a difference. You are vital to the Lord’s team—one team with one purpose. Through your diversity, build strength in unity. Bind yourselves together in all holiness. Anchor yourselves to “the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph. 2:20).

As Sister Winder mentioned, the funeral service for Sister Camilla Kimball was held earlier today. Magnificent and well-deserved tributes were paid to her. We can learn from her great example of courage. Let us emulate her faith and likewise heed this teaching from the Book of Mormon, which gave her such strength and security:

“Remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall” (Hel. 5:12).

Beloved sisters, let your lives be committed to your Father in Heaven, to his Only Begotten Son, and to his church, restored by them in this latter day. I testify that it is true and that President Benson is the prophet on earth today. A dispensation of the gospel has been entrusted to our care. Everlasting priesthood principles, laws, and powers depend upon our partnership.

I invoke the blessings of Almighty God upon you that you may be successful in fulfilling your divine destiny, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.