

# Women's Greatest Challenge

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President Kimball, President Tanner, President Romney, and other beloved brethren and sisters: It has been three years since this historic Tabernacle was filled with the women of the Church for the purpose of hearing the counsel of the prophet of God. We have missed the sweet spirit of sisterhood found in gathering together and the blessing of peace and comfort which comes when we meet as sisters, by appointment in his name.

It has been an eventful three year period—in the history of the world and the history of the Church. And, in some very particular ways, it has been a challenging three years. Never before has so much been said and written about woman's role and her place in society.

I have had the blessing of meeting with many of you during these three years, and I know that you are prayerfully seeking to understand what the Lord requires of you in this swiftly changing world. The new convert who came up to me after a meeting put it this way: "What is a Mormon woman?" From Japan came the inquiry: "Now that we have forsaken the pattern of our parents and have increased the number of children in our family, how do we raise them?" From women who head their own families come the pleas for direction: "How can I be independent and self-supporting and also stay at home with my children, when there is no support from other sources?" From the single woman: "How can I fit into a Church that is family oriented when there is no husband in my life? Is there work for me to do in the kingdom of God?" The answer is yes. The work of women is essential in the kingdom, whether as wife, mother, sister, or all three.

As sisters in Relief Society, we have a noble heritage, a present challenge, and a vision of greatness to be. With the organization of the Relief Society came the Lord's program for his daughters. The cornerstone of that work was to become deeply engaged in relieving suffering among his children.

The Prophet also instructed the sisters that their Society "is not only to relieve the poor, but to save souls." That challenge is much with us today.

Since we last met together as women of the Church to address our particular concerns, we have been forced into confrontation with many of the issues of our day.

It is important to the spread of the gospel message that we approach the current problems with thoughtful analysis and with the spirit of love. As the Prophet Joseph pointed out in Nauvoo to those earliest Relief Society sisters, we do have a responsibility for the moral climate of the communities in which we live. We cannot abdicate our responsibility as citizens.

In the early days of the Church here in this valley, the leaders of the Relief Society, other stalwart women of the community, and the presiding Brethren of the Church worked together to establish suffrage for women among the Saints. It was not expedient. It was not even judicious, in the light of the desperate struggle for statehood, and yet the right of women to vote was unanimously agreed upon and written into their constitution by the first legislators of Utah territory because it was a righteous principle.

Today, Latter-day Saint women with more opportunity for education, with the right of voting, must step forward

to be part of the solution of society's problems. We must exercise responsible citizenship.

How do we do it?

Henry Ward Beecher once declared: "Whatever is only almost true is quite false, and among the most dangerous of errors, because being so near truth, it is the more likely to lead astray."

In today's world I feel our greatest challenge is to work out solutions to our problems that are consistent with the spirit of the gospel teachings.

Three significant steps are:

First, prayer. Let us pray constantly that we may not be deceived, and live close to the Lord, obeying his laws. Then we shall find the light and the truth we need for that particular set of problems with which we grapple individually.

Second, scriptures. Study the scriptures, for what he has said to one he has said to all. Study the life of the Savior; he is the example for each one of us.

Third, listen to the prophet who leads us today. One of the great messages of the Restoration is that the heavens are open and God leads us through his anointed prophet.

On political matters President Kimball has encouraged us to study the issues and use our agency. He has counseled us to select leaders and programs consistent with the principles of truth. He has urged us to act independently.

On matters of morality he has given more specific counsel. On such issues as abortion, the Equal Rights Amendment, homosexuality, and pornography—current issues sometimes categorized as women's issues—he has given direct counsel. Mormon women know that they have the right to accept or reject the counsel; but in keeping with fundamental doctrine, they must also realize that to reject it is a heavy responsibility. It is the calling of a prophet to see to the very heart of a moral issue, to envision its future course, and to warn the people of its consequences. Sometimes those who do not agree with what he says may refuse to heed the warning. Only later, sadly, is the truth of his words made obvious to all.

Sometimes the people do heed the prophet's warning. When Jonah was sent to Nineveh to prophesy the destruction of that great, wicked city, "the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them" (Jonah 3:5). They turned from their evil ways in repentance, and God spared their city.

In the production *Because of Elizabeth* presented in Nauvoo this summer at the dedication of the Monument to Women, Elizabeth concludes that she will not be able to solve all the problems she sees nor to meet every challenge. But she recognizes that what she does not get done, others will try to do. And as the play ends, one is struck with the great influence one woman has had in the lives of the thousands who are her direct descendants. And beyond those thousands are thousands more who have heard the gospel because of her missionary sons and grandsons and great-grandsons and great-granddaughters.

This is the great, traditional, ongoing, irreplaceable contribution women have made over the past decades. And we believe it is important to continue and value this work of women. Women should see the magnitude of that

calling clearly. Beyond that central theme there are many other problems to solve, and women have a responsibility to be part of the solutions. We must use our talents in every way we can, because it will take the best that is in each of us to make headway in solving the problems of the world today.

And perhaps more important for us, it will take all our heart, might, mind, and strength to do the work the Lord has given us—that is to live so that we, and those we can influence, will gain exaltation in the kingdom of God.

We are the people raised up to do this work; we, the women of the Church, hand-in-hand with the men—our husbands, our sons, our brothers in the priesthood.

May the Lord bless us as women with that eternal perspective. May our decisions be those that will allow us to work in love and unity and faithfulness I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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