

GENERAL WOMEN'S MEETING

With the theme "A Season for Strength," a general women's meeting was held Saturday evening, September 24, 1983, in the Tabernacle in Salt Lake City, Utah. Latter-day Saint women and girls ten years of age and older met in the Tabernacle and Assembly Hall on Temple Square and gathered in meetinghouses to view the proceedings by television and satellite coverage. The program included music

by a multiregion women's chorus, pre-recorded tape segments, and talks by President Gordon B. Hinckley of the First Presidency and the general presidents of the Relief Society, Primary, and Young Women.

President Gordon B. Hinckley, Second Counselor to the First Presidency, gave the following talk at that meeting.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

My beloved sisters, it is a privilege and an honor to be with you.

You are not alone

I suppose this is the largest gathering of women ever convened in the history of the Church. The Tabernacle is filled to capacity. Additionally, women are assembled in over six hundred stake centers, and many others are watching in homes where television is available. As I have looked over this vast congregation, I have thought, "What a profitable day for the hairdressers!"

I know that many of you out there feel lonely at times. Some of you girls find that there are only two or three Latter-day Saints in the large schools which you attend. You women who work may find yourselves the only members of the Church at your places of employment. You who are widows and some who have been divorced may feel that you are alone. The numbers who are participating in this meeting tonight should give you the assurance that you are not alone. You are part of the greatest sorority or sisterhood on earth. It probably includes some two million women.

"What are little girls made of?"

This vast congregation includes girls and women from the age of ten and up. I am happy for the inclusion of the ten-year-olds. Ten is a great age, a beautiful age, when a child who previously appeared to be all arms and legs and appetite seems to partake of a refining influence that brings with it beauty and grace. It is like blossoms in the spring that burst with the warmth of the sun. It is a time of awakening of mental and physical powers. It is the bridge season between childhood and youth.

Do you know that the great prophet-historian Mormon received his charge concerning the sacred records when he was only ten years of age? The book which we have today, this sacred and marvelous testament of Christ, resulted from Mormon's faithfulness in meeting that assignment. Never discount the importance of a ten-year-old.

"What are little girls made of? Sugar and spice, and everything nice." So goes the old nursery rhyme. But more importantly, they are the promise of the future. Through them, eventually, must filter the qualities of all of the earlier generations, which will become the bone and the tissue, the minds and the spirits, of the generations yet to be.

To you young girls I say with all of the strength and conviction I can muster, be sweet, be good, be strong

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and virtuous and wonderful. Somehow I feel that the Lord included you with those of whom he spoke when he said, "Except ye . . . become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). Channing Pollock, the gifted author and playwright, once wished, through one of his characters, that we might all be born old and gradually grow younger and ever more innocent until at death we have become as little children.

Young women: Prepare for any eventuality

I next would like to say a few words to you young women, you who have crossed the threshold from childhood and early youth into the maturity of your later teens and early twenties. For you this must be a season for strength. It is a season that demands discipline of mind and of body. This is the season for preparation, and the Lord has said, "If ye are prepared ye shall not fear" (D&C 38:30).

It is a time for education. The world that lies ahead of you will be fiercely competitive. Now is the time to train yourselves for possible future responsibilities.

Education is a tradition that has come down from our early history. We believe in the training of our youth, girls as well as boys. Brigham Young once said, "We have sisters here who, if they had the privilege of studying, would make just as good mathematicians or accountants as any man" (*Journal of Discourses*, 13:61).

You have available to you tremendous opportunities for training your minds and your hands. You will wish for marriage and the companionship of a good husband. But none of us can foretell the future. Prepare yourselves for any eventuality. You need not go to a university if that is not your taste. There are wonderful technical colleges across the land which will hone your skills and assist you in qualifying yourselves for future responsibilities.

Hopefully, most of you will marry. But the training you have received will not have been in vain. It will be a blessing whether you be single or married.

Keep yourselves worthy of marriage. This is an age when strength is needed to retain that worthiness. Scarcely if ever in the history of the world have we been so widely exposed to those seductive influences which lead to degradation, sin, and regret. The merchants of pornography and some designers of entertainment are as clever as hell itself with their beguiling wares. They would lead you into a trap that could eventually bring only sorrow, remorse, and heartache.

Said the Lord, "Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly." He then gave this promise: "Then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God. . . ."

"The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion . . . ; thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion, and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee forever and ever" (D&C 121:45-46).

Exaltation

I paraphrase a few words of a statement made by the First Presidency more than forty years ago:

How glorious is she who lives a chaste life. She walks unafraid in the full glare of the noonday sun, for she is without moral infirmity. She can be reached by no shafts of base calumny, for her armor is without flaw. Her virtue cannot be challenged by any just accuser, for she lives above reproach. Her cheek is never blotted with shame, for she is without hidden sin. She is honored and respected by all mankind, for she is beyond their censure. She is loved by the Lord, for she stands without blemish. The exaltations of eternities await her coming. (*Messages of the First Presidency*, comp. by James R. Clark, 6 vols [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1975], 3 Oct. 1942, p. 6:177.)

Now if there be any here who have slipped, I hold out to you the assurance that there is forgiveness for the individual who truly repents. God will forgive those who acknowledge the error of their ways and who demonstrate by the goodness of their lives the sincerity of their repentance.

Marriage in the temple: A privilege beyond price

I should like now to say a few words to those of you who are married. I would hope that you may have been married in the house of the Lord. Our Father in Heaven, who loves his children, has provided for them a privilege beyond price, and that is the eternal sealing of the most precious of all relationships.

To you who have this priceless blessing, live worthy of it. Loyalty is of the very essence of your temple vows and covenants—loyalty to your companion, loyalty to your children, loyalty to God with whom you have made solemn covenant. He will not be mocked. Glorious and wonderful are the promises to those who keep their covenants and walk in obedience to his divine commandments. The sense of responsibility that comes therewith will sweeten marriage, will bring a sanctifying influence to the home, will make more precious the children who come of that union, and will give peace throughout the seasons of life and comfort in time of death.

Be patient and be an example

I recognize that there are many in this vast congregation who have not had the opportunity of temple marriage, whose husbands may not be members of the Church or may not have qualified themselves to go to the house of the Lord. To you I wish to say, be patient, be prayerful. Stifle your tendency to criticize. Live the kind of life in your home that will cause your companion to see in you that goodness, that

virtue, and that strength which come of the gospel.

I remember a family I knew fifty years ago. The wife was a devoted member of the Church. The husband was not a member. He smoked and drank. She hoped and she prayed. She lived for the day when his heart might be touched by the Spirit of the Lord. Years passed one after another into more than a decade. Her example was one of goodness and gladness and faith. After many years he began to soften. He saw what the Church did for her and for their children. He turned around. He humbled himself. He was baptized. He has since served as a quorum president and a bishop, as a missionary, and as a worker in the temple.

You have not failed until you have quit trying, and please remember that your example in your home will be a more persuasive sermon than will any other kind of preachment.

Salute to homemakers

I salute most warmly and sincerely you dedicated and wonderful homemakers. I have only respect for the title "housewife."

I clipped this from the *Wall Street Journal*, titled "The Most Creative Job in the World":

"It involves taste, fashion, decorating, recreation, education, transportation, psychology, romance, cuisine, designing, literature, medicine, handicraft, art, horticulture, economics, government, community relations, pediatrics, geriatrics, entertainment, maintenance, purchasing, direct mail, law, accounting, religion, energy and management. Anyone who can handle all those has to be somebody special. She is. She's a homemaker" (3 June 1983).

Unmarried: Take advantage of opportunities

Now, a word to you who have not married. It would be a beautiful world if every girl had the privilege of mar-

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riage to a good man whom she could look upon with pride and gladness as her companion in time and eternity, hers alone to love and cherish, to respect and help.

But it does not always work out that way. There are some who, for reasons unexplainable, do not have the opportunity of marriage. To you I should like to say, don't spend your time and wear out your lives wandering about in the wasteland of self-pity. God has given you talents of one kind or another. He has given you the capacity to serve the needs of others and bless their lives with your kindness and concern. Reach out to someone in need. There are so very many out there.

Add knowledge to knowledge. Refine your mind and skills in a chosen field of discipline. There are tremendous opportunities for you if you are prepared to take advantage of them. Nearly all of the honorable vocations of life are now open to women. Do not feel that because you are single God has forsaken you. The world needs you. The Church needs you. So very many people and causes need your strength and wisdom and talents.

Be prayerful, and do not lose hope. But do not become obsessed with ambition to find a companion. Your obsession likely will only make you less attractive, or it may cause a weakening of your standards. Live the very best life of which you are capable, and the Lord in his greater wisdom and in his eternal season will give you answer to your prayers.

To mothers who must work

To you women who find it necessary to work when you would rather be at home, may I speak briefly. I know that there are many of you who find yourselves in this situation. Some of you have been abandoned and are divorced, with children to care for. Some of you are widows with dependent families. I honor you and respect you for your integrity and spirit of self-reliance. I pray that the Lord will bless

you with strength and great capacity, for you need both. You have the responsibilities of both breadwinner and homemaker. I know that it is difficult. I know that it is discouraging. I pray that the Lord will bless you with a special wisdom and the remarkable talent needed to provide your children with time and companionship and love and with that special direction which only a mother can give. I pray also that he will bless you with help, unstintingly given, from family, friends, and the Church, which will lift some of the burden from your shoulders and help you in your times of extremity.

We sense, at least in some small degree, the loneliness you must occasionally feel and the frustrations you must experience as you try to cope with problems that sometimes seem beyond your capacity to handle. Sometimes you need food for your tables, and we trust that bishops will be there to supply food and other goods and services under the great program which the Lord has provided in his Church. But we know that more often your greater need is for understanding and appreciation and companionship. We shall try a little harder to cultivate these virtues, and I urge you sisters who are in a position to do so to reach out with greater concern to those who find themselves in these less fortunate circumstances.

To mothers who work when not necessary

Now to others who work when it is not necessary and who, while doing so, leave children to the care of those who often are only poor substitutes, I offer a word of caution. Do not follow a practice which will bring you later regret. If the purpose of your daily employment is simply to get money for a boat or a fancy automobile or some other desirable but unnecessary thing, and in the process you lose the companionship of your children and the opportunity to rear them, you may find that you have lost the substance while grasping at the shadow.

Women's responsibility in building the kingdom

In conclusion, I should like to say a word to all women of the Church. I know of no doctrine which states that we made a choice when we came to earth as to whether we wished to be male or female. That choice was made by our Father in Heaven in his infinite wisdom. I am satisfied that he loves his daughters as much as he loves his sons. President Harold B. Lee once remarked that priesthood is the power by which God works through us as men. I should like to add that motherhood is the means by which God carries forward his grand design of continuity of the race. Both priesthood and motherhood are essentials of the plan of the Lord.

Each complements the other. Each is needed by the other. God has created us male and female, each unique in his or her individual capacities and potential. The woman is the bearer and the nurturer of children. The man is the provider and protector. No legislation can alter the sexes. Legislation should provide equality of opportunity, equality of compensation, equality of political privilege. But any legislation which is designed to create neuter gender of that which God created male and female will bring more problems than benefits. Of that I am convinced.

I wish with all my heart we would spend less of our time talking about rights and more talking about responsibilities. God has given the women of this Church a work to do in building his kingdom. That concerns all aspects of our great triad of responsibility—which is, first, to teach the gospel to the world; second, to strengthen the faith and build the happiness of the member-

ship of the Church; and, third, to carry forward the great work of salvation for the dead.

A season for strength

This is a season for strength. I conclude with these stirring words of Moroni, written as he scaled his record to come forth in the dispensation of the fulness of times:

"Awake, and arise from the dust, O Jerusalem; yea, and put on thy beautiful garments, O daughter of Zion; and strengthen thy stakes and enlarge thy borders forever, that thou mayest no more be confounded, that the covenants of the Eternal Father which he hath made unto thee, O house of Israel, may be fulfilled.

"Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness" (Moroni 10:31-32).

Live up to your inheritance

Put on thy beautiful garments, O daughters of Zion. Live up to the great and magnificent inheritance which the Lord God, your Father in Heaven, has provided for you. Rise above the dust of the world. Know that you are daughters of God, children with a divine birthright. Walk in the sun with your heads high, knowing that you are loved and honored, that you are a part of his kingdom, and that there is for you a great work to be done which cannot be left to others.

God be thanked for the wonderful women of this Church. May he plant in your hearts a sense of pride in your capacities and a conviction of truth which shall be as a rudder to keep you safe through every storm, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.