

Elder Marvin J. Ashton

Unusual response

A few weeks ago while in Idaho reorganizing a stake presidency, I not only met some outstanding priesthood leaders and set three of them apart as a new stake presidency, but I also met a very special young lady I will not soon forget. The newly called presidency, one of whom was serving as a bishop at the time, asked if I could interview a prospective bishop so if he were cleared he could be installed the following Sunday after conference. The appointment was made. I sat in a private office with a well-groomed, attractive couple.

After a few words of greeting and introductions, I looked at her and said, "Tell me about your husband." She hesitated and finally said, "Elder Ashton, I really don't know him very well." Since this was a most unusual response, I promptly said, "Please tell me about that." She responded with, "We have only been married three weeks."

This young couple, both in their early thirties, he an attorney and she a school teacher by profession, were still honeymooning, and their deep, newly found love for each other was most evident. When I said, "I want to talk to the two of you about your husband becoming a bishop," she said, "Some nights ago I had a dream indicating Randy would be a bishop. I just hoped it wouldn't come too soon." She continued with, "Even though we are newlyweds [and incidentally, they told me the reason they had waited until their thirties to marry was because they had spent a long time finding each other] if you are impressed to call Randy to be a bishop, he will be a good one, and I will help him."

Respect and appreciation for good women

What a beautiful attitude. What sustaining support. Her commitment to

her husband, Church, and self was made long before I asked my questions. She had resolved to choose the good part, reminding me of the meaningful statement made about Mary in Luke 10:42: "One thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

The more I become involved in the Church and in communities worldwide, the greater becomes my appreciation and respect for good women. Today I would like to pay sincere tribute and give encouragement to these special ladies. My personal definition of a good woman is any woman who is moving in the right direction. I humbly thank God constantly for their courage, strength, and commitment. Through you noble sisters, each in different circumstances in life, by your example, encouragement, conduct, and personal integrity, God's work goes forward with greater purpose and accomplishment.

Single women in the Church

Let me share with you some recent experiences, correspondence, and observations, particularly with the single women in the Church. Most of them are doing well in the situations in which they find themselves. They, however, sincerely need our love, encouragement, and respect. They, along with all of the rest of us, need not be resigned to their present status or role. Eternal progression is a basic part of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Happiness, enthusiasm, and joy in daily living are mandatory if we would move forward and choose the good part.

The principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ will never change, but environment, circumstances, institutions, and cultural patterns do. Our challenge is to move forward in our present realms with commitment and enthusiasm. We must do our part to progress

and enjoy life while we are in the process of meeting our situations.

The mother of a Filipino missionary recently wrote to her son's mission president: "Thank you so much for the spiritual support and counsel that you give to my son. . . . Being a lone parent for almost eight years would have been very hard for me, were it not for the gospel's truthfulness. I know God lives and He loves me. He hears and answers my earnest and sincere prayers. I still have seven children, including our missionary, under my care. The Lord has blessed me with a talent that has helped me through the years to support my family. I earn a living by serving as a dressmaker. I'm indeed grateful for my 'Church family'—members who have inspired me and helped me to accept cheerfully and confidently my single parenthood."

Here is a sister who has learned that God is well pleased with families of one or more if they include Him and adhere to His teachings.

Oh, how powerful are good women who choose the good part.

Use power of choice wisely

And although He will always be at our side if we will but invite Him, never will He take from His children the great gift of agency—the power to choose. Young mothers (single or otherwise) must learn to use this power wisely. There may be times when more than one course of action is placed before us. Each is right. It is then that wise and prudent decisions must be made, taking into consideration the season of life and the pertinent facts.

Some mothers seem to have the capacity and energy to make their children's clothes, bake, give piano lessons, go to Relief Society, teach Sunday School, attend parent-teacher association meetings, and so on. Other mothers look upon such women as models and feel inadequate, depressed, and think they are failures when they make comparisons.

We should not allow ourselves to be trapped into such damaging inferiority feelings. This is another tool of Satan. Many seem to put too much pressure on themselves to be a "supermom" or "superwoman."

Choose the best way

Sisters, do not allow yourselves to be made to feel inadequate or frustrated because you cannot do everything others seem to be accomplishing. Rather, each should assess her own situation, her own energy, and her own talents, and then choose the best way to mold her family into a team, a unit that works together and supports each other. Only you and your Father in Heaven know your needs, strengths, and desires. Around this knowledge your personal course must be charted and your choices made.

Let me share another example of a courageous single mother who has chosen the good part and effectively lives within her situation. She is in her mid-thirties and has suffered much heartache in her life. Shortly after she and her husband were married in the temple, he became inactive. This man chose to spend most of his time with male companions. There was no concern for the welfare of his family nor any desire to build a meaningful relationship with his wife. Church activities became nonexistent in his life, and soon he was led down the path of transgression.

Of necessity this lovely woman is providing financially for herself and her children. Her paramount goal is to make a happy home environment in which her boys and girls can feel emotional, financial, and spiritual security. For ten years their home was deprived of these ingredients of happiness.

Even though she hopes that marriage may come again sometime in the future, for the present she is concerned with the needs of her children and is working to build a strong family unit centered around the Church and its teachings.

As a single parent she has chosen the good part.

In times of hurt and discouragement, it may be consoling for her and for all of us to recall that no one can do anything permanently to us that will last for eternity. Only we ourselves can affect our eternal progression.

"Live richly, fully, joyfully"

There is a temptation on the part of some of our sisters who have never married to give up, to stop trying, to think of what they don't have in life instead of what they do have. It is important for them to never give up, to never cease living. As Sister Carol Clark has so beautifully stated: "The personal challenge is not to wait successfully but to live richly, fully, joyfully. The goal is not to wait for the right person but to be the right person" (*A Singular Life: Perspectives for the Single Woman* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1974], p. 9). May I emphasize the word *live*. Live richly, fully, joyfully. Be excited about your chance to grow and develop your potential. Be excited about life and the opportunities and privileges that the Lord has given you.

Develop good self-image

Make a decision as to the kind of person you want to be regardless of external circumstances. The first challenge in life is to learn, accept, and internalize "Who am I?" If this question is researched carefully in the scriptures and in Church teachings, the importance of each and every soul will be verified. A good self-image is one of the most important and necessary steps in facing life. So often we believe about ourselves only the things that others have implanted. There is no woman in or out of the Church who is not a loved child of God—no one!

In Psalm 8:4-5 we read:

"What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"

"For thou has made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour."

But Satan is ever present, trying to destroy our glory and remove our crown. One of his most powerful tools is discouragement. Single sisters, don't let your discouragement make Satan rejoice.

Widen circles of activity

Sometimes singles are inclined to become wrapped up in themselves rather than searching for a way to affect the future. Become success oriented. Know that you can succeed. Believe that you can succeed. Step into auxiliary organizations of the Church and into community organizations and make your presence felt.

Thinking and acting women today are taking part in making history in one of the greatest periods of mankind. Their personal contributions not only make the difference today, but their good works have mighty import upon the future. As circles of activity widen, so will the number of friends and acquaintances widen. And then the influence of good women will have an even greater impact on those with whom they associate.

We must constantly remember it is not our situation or problems that make us unhappy; it is our failure to properly resolve them.

Someone has said that happiness is like a butterfly. The more you chase it, the more it will elude you. But if you turn your attention to other things, it comes and sits softly on your shoulder. (See Nathaniel Hawthorne, quoted in *Reader's Digest*, Apr. 1982, p. 148.)

Consider impact of changes

In the Church our leaders have a great desire and spend much thought and prayer in trying to offer guidelines that may help with solutions. In reference to a recent letter in which the First Presidency gave guidelines for membership in singles wards, let me

emphasize it is contemplated that no abrupt changes in existing programs be made without considering their impact on the lives of those who are presently involved in singles wards. Stake presidents are now authorized to make exceptions to the general policy after consultation and joint agreement with the bishop involved.

No one should be asked to leave. While there are definite advantages, with other things being equal, to an older single person being active in his or her own conventional ward, no one should be displaced or left to feel unwanted when proper marriage opportunities fail to develop. Certain age restrictions are prescribed by policy guidelines for good reasons, but no one should feel displaced or terminated, if you please, through abrupt changes.

Opportunities for growth, development, happiness

Programs are planned and implemented with love and concern for each person in the Church. The desire is to offer opportunities for growth, development, and happiness for all members. With each passing year, the value of our sisters who are living without companions becomes more apparent. Strong leaders, good teachers, and dedicated mothers constantly emerge from this group of sisters. They live and serve with courage and ingenuity. Through perseverance they are finding success.

To be in control of your life, to be a success regardless of your situation, whether happily married, unhappily married, a single parent, a widow, or a wife of an inactive husband, I recommend that you come to know your Father in Heaven. Come to love Him, and always remember that He loves you and will give you guidance and support if you will but give Him the chance. Include Him in your decision making. Include Him when you take inventory of your personal worth. "For behold,

this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men [and women] to perform their labors" (Alma 34:32).

Set your goals—without goals you cannot measure your progress. But don't become frustrated because there are no obvious victories. Remind yourself that striving can be more important than arriving. If you are striving for excellence—if you are trying your best day by day with the wisest use of your time and energy to reach realistic goals—you are a success.

God bless valiant women

Commune daily with your Heavenly Father who knows you best of all. He knows your talents, your strengths, and your weaknesses. You are here on the earth at this time to develop and refine these characteristics. I promise you He will help you. He is aware of your needs. He is aware of your unanswered prayers.

God bless our valiant women members. You are choice in His and our eyes. We pray that with His help and our personal efforts happiness will be achieved. Certainly when we choose the good part, regardless of our current circumstances or situations, life will be lived to the fullest.

May God help us to so do, I pray in the worthy name of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and Friend, amen.

President Hinckley

Elder Marvin J. Ashton has just spoken to us.

The Choir and congregation will join in singing "Now Let Us Rejoice," following which we shall hear from Elder David B. Haight, a member of the Council of the Twelve.

The Choir and congregation sang "Now Let Us Rejoice."
