

Be an Example of the Believers

M. Russell Ballard

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles



My dear sisters, both young and not so young, speaking to you for a few minutes tonight is a distinct honor for me. I pray that the Lord will bless me that my remarks will be helpful to each one of you.

I am aware that you are a very diverse audience. Tonight I see beautiful young and innocent faces, shining with a zest for living. I also see white-haired grandmothers, who radiate a genuine love for the Lord. Undoubtedly some of you are newly baptized members, while others have spent their lifetime in faithful service to the Church. Among you are those who are married and those who are single, those who are divorced and raising your children alone, and those who are widows.

Many of you are healthy and happy and are in tune spiritually, while others bear the burdens of poor health and loneliness and may be struggling to find peace of mind.

Some of you very likely are striving to be “super-moms.” You feel a need to spend time with your husband and children. You want to be sure to have family prayer, read the scriptures, and have family home evening. You also feel the need help children with homework and music lessons; keep your home presentable; prepare nutritious meals; keep clothes clean and mended; chauffeur children and possibly their friends to school and to a variety of lessons, practices, and games; and keep everyone in the family on schedule, making sure they are where they should be when they should be there. And that is all within your family and home. It makes me weary just reviewing all of this! It doesn't include PTA, volunteer service, or caring for family members who are ill or aged. You feel the need to protect you family from the many evil influences in the world such as suggestive television, films, and videos; alcohol; drugs; and pornography. You are committed to and faithfully fulfill you Church callings. In addition, many of you must earn a living because financial pressures are real and cannot be ignored. If anything is left or neglected, you may feel that you have failed.

To you who feel harried and overwhelmed and who wonder whether you ever will be able to run fast enough to catch the departing train you think you should be on, I suggest that you learn to deal with each day as it comes, doing the best you can, without feelings of guilt or inadequacy. I saw a bumper sticker the other day, sisters, that may say it all:

“God put me on earth to accomplish a certain number of things. Right now I am so far behind, I will never die!”

Remember, sisters, we all have our own challenges to work out while passing the tests of mortality, and we probably often think ours are the most difficult. Recognize limitations; no one can do everything. When you

have done the best you can, be satisfied and don't look back and second-guess, wondering how you could have done more. Be at peace within yourselves. Rather than berate yourself for what you didn't do, congratulate yourself for what you did.

I give this counsel to my own five daughters and two daughters-in-law when they worry over whether they are accomplishing all they think they should. Remember, our Heavenly Father never expects more of us than we can do. If your husband and children need this reminder, then feel free to share this counsel with them.

Regardless of your present circumstances, you devoted women in this great sisterhood throughout the world are, in your unique way, performing a remarkable service in helping to establish and strengthen the Church. Women play a crucial role in helping people accept the gospel and establish firm testimonies in their hearts.

Faithful women and young women who have recently joined the Church already are assisting in the work in many newly opened countries in eastern Europe, including the Soviet Union. The work rolls forward in the vast continent of Africa and is hastened through the service of faithful women. Righteous women join the Church in Asia and help to strengthen it in their own lands. Many wonderful women valiantly serve the Lord in Latin America and on the islands of the sea. In fact, dear sisters, your influence for good is felt in 135 countries and territories where the gospel is now being taught.

The strength of this Church from its beginning in 1830 has been and will continue to be enhanced through the faithful service of good women and young women like you.

To each and every one of you, please know how much your leaders love you and pray for you. Also know that we understand your challenges, and be assured that regardless of your circumstances at the moment, each one of you is precious to your Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The general officers of the Church travel throughout the nations of the earth listening, teaching, and testifying to the truthfulness of the gospel. As we visit the members, we recognize the positive influence you dear sisters have upon this great work. We know you are loyal to the Church and love the Lord. We feel your sustaining influence.

Be patient with the Brethren, and know that the General Authorities are teaching priesthood leaders in stakes and wards to listen to you and to counsel with you on matters pertaining to the needs of young and older women. Your opinions are valuable, even essential, to the Brethren because no one else has your perspective and insights. You have much to offer in strengthening the homes and families of the Church. We marvel at your strength, we value your service, and we rejoice in your faithful quest for eternal life.

Through your faith and personal righteousness in keeping the commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ, you can qualify for all of the blessings our Heavenly Father has promised to His obedient children. Some of you may not have an opportunity in mortality to fulfill every righteous desire of your heart. But you can be certain that no eternal blessing will be denied you if you remain faithful and live the principles of the gospel throughout your earthly life.

From time to time, leaders of the Church endeavor to give you guidance for your spiritual and temporal welfare. One principle that we teach repeatedly is the value of the precious freedom the Lord has given to you to make your own decisions. Moral agency enables the children of God to choose what they will believe and how they will live in mortality. Based on your obedience in living gospel principles, you will be judged according to your

works. With the marvelous gift of moral agency, you can study the scriptures and the teachings of the leaders of the Church and, through the promptings of the Spirit, make correct choices that will bring peace and eternal joy to your souls.

Most of you are familiar with Victor Hugo's classic novel *Les Miserables*. A modern composer has brought that story to the musical stage, where he chronicles the consequences that grow out of a lifetime of choices—some wrong, but many gloriously right. The central character, Jean Valjean, is sentenced to years of hard labor for stealing a bit of bread to keep his loved ones from starvation. Newly released from prison, he finds food and a night's refuge in the home of a priest. Bitter and hopeless, he slips away before dawn, taking with him the silver from the rectory table. The police apprehend him and ask the priest to identify the silver as stolen property. The priest tells them that not only was the silver given freely, but that Valjean had forgotten the two candlesticks that went with it.

Grateful and humbled, Jean vows to live a life of service to God and his fellowmen. Years later, in a case of mistaken identity, a man is brought to trial in Valjean's place. Jean now must make a seemingly impossible choice. He reviews in his mind the consequences if he chooses to step forward, identify himself, and serve his own sentence. By now, he has become very successful. He employs thousands; they will be jobless. He is the mayor; his town will suffer. He has been benefactor to many; they will have no advocate. Surely he is justified if he remains silent. From the depth of his soul, we hear the song's refrain:

*Can I condemn this man to slavery,
Pretend I do not see his agony, ...
Can I conceal myself forevermore?*

*If speak I am condemned. If I stay silent,
I am damned.*

And out of despair we hear his decision:

*My soul belongs to God, I know.
I made that bargain long ago.
He gave me hope when hope was gone.
He gave me strength to journey on.*

Faced with the ageless question "Who am I?" and recognizing that if he does not speak, the one betrayed will be himself, he answers, "Who am I? I'm Jean Valjean!"

Now, my dear sisters, each one of you will be required repeatedly to ask the question "Who am I?" I know of no better answer for the women of the Church than the one found in the Young Women theme:

"We are daughters of our Heavenly Father who loves us, and we love Him. We will 'stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places ...' as we strive to live the Young Women values, which are: faith, divine nature, individual worth, knowledge, choice and accountability, good works and integrity.

"We believe as we come to accept and act upon these values, we will be prepared to make and keep sacred covenants, receive the ordinances of the temple, and enjoy the blessings of exaltation." (*Ensign*, Apr. 1989, p. 45.)

In my judgment, this is an inspired statement, and if understood and followed by all of our Father's children, this would be a much better world. If you live by these truths, you will not be carried along with the stream of women who do not seem to know who they are, their reason for being, or their prominent role in the plan of salvation.

In 1979, President Spencer W. Kimball addressed the women of the Church just as I am doing tonight. At that time, speaking as the prophet of God, using words that are truly prophetic, he proclaimed: "Much of the major growth that is coming to the Church in the last days will come because many of the good women of the world (in whom there is often such an inner sense of spirituality) will be drawn to the Church in large numbers. This will happen to the degree that the women of the Church reflect righteousness and articulateness in their lives. ... Thus it will be that female exemplars of the Church will be a significant force in both the numerical and the spiritual growth of the Church in the last days." (*Ensign*, Nov. 1979, pp. 1034.)

What an ennobling phrase, my beloved sisters. *Female exemplars!* What a glorious promise—to know that you can strengthen all those around you.

Young women, last October I spoke to the men in the priesthood session of general conference, talking to them primarily about morals. I told the young men to cultivate a considerate attitude toward women of all ages. I taught them to respect you, to show you common, sincere courtesy. I counseled them to never succumb to a feeling that peer pressure is a justification for any kind of moral transgression.

Transgression of any kind is always accompanied by a loss of self-esteem. You young women have a responsibility to live exemplary lives so the young men will respect your values and treat you as daughters of God deserve to be treated. Righteous daughters of God, our Eternal Father, are absolutely essential if the Church is to fulfill its destiny in preparing the earth for the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

May God bless you dear sisters that each one of you can be an example, a light to those around you. You are daughters of your Heavenly Father, who loves you. May each one of you manifest your love for Him through your righteous, exemplary life. Always know in your hearts, dear sisters, that the Church is true.

I testify to you that Jesus Christ lives and that He presides over this Church. President Benson is the prophet of the Lord. Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son love the precious women of the Church, as do all of your leaders. May God bless you now and always is my humble prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.