

The Grand Key-Words for the Relief Society

James E. Faust

My dear sisters, it is a humbling privilege to be with you tonight. We are especially honored with the presence of both President Hinckley and President Monson. I appreciate the sweet prayer of Sister Silver and the music of this extraordinary choir. Your music has been uplifting. Each of you radiates faith and goodness. The messages of Sister Aileen Clyde, Sister Chieko Okazaki, and Sister Elaine Jack on faith, hope, and charity have been inspiring.

I wish to express my profound admiration of and appreciation to each of you wonderful sisters, young and old. I thank you for your faith and devotion. I thank you for your example of righteousness. It is marvelous to observe how you handle the many challenges with which you are confronted. Your God-given appreciation for the spiritual, the lovely, and the beautiful is part of the divinity which is within you. You make life so much more pleasant and worthwhile for all of us.

A year ago in this meeting, President Gordon B. Hinckley, speaking for the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, announced and read the Proclamation on the Family. Because you mothers are the heart and soul of any family, it was appropriate that it was first read in the General Relief Society Meeting.

I revere the influence and accomplishments of Relief Society. It is the greatest women's organization in the world. You are especially privileged to belong to this wonderful organization. My life has been richly blessed because of Relief Society. My great-grandmother was a ward Relief Society president for 33 years. I have been married to both the stake and ward Relief Society president! Both the same woman! Our eldest daughter now serves as ward Relief Society president. One of our daughters-in-law is a stake Relief Society president. As my dear Ruth faithfully attended Relief Society over the years, our home and family was blessed with more of spirituality and peace. Things seemed to go smoother because of the spiritual enrichment she received. I feel well schooled in the benefits of Relief Society. I learned long ago to sustain the priesthood and not get in the way of Relief Society.

The Prophet Joseph Smith spoke of this society and quoted the Savior's words: "Ye shall do the work, which ye see me do.' These are the grand key-words for the society to act upon."¹

For the daughters of God, doing the Savior's work does not, of course, include the use of priesthood keys, authority, or powers. But it does include building faith by testimony and example. It includes teaching the doctrines of salvation. It includes following the Savior's example of love for all mankind. It includes ministering to others, for, as the Prophet Joseph said when the Relief Society was organized, "This is a charitable Society, and according to your natures; it is natural for females to have feelings of charity and benevolence."² "Let the weight of your innocence, kindness and affection be felt ... ; not war, not jangle, not contradiction, or dispute, but meekness, love, purity—these are the things that should magnify you in the eyes of all good men."³

This charge to the women of the Church carries a promise. Said the Prophet Joseph: "If you live up to these principles, how great and glorious will be your reward in the celestial kingdom! If you live up to your privileges, the angels cannot be restrained from being your associates."⁴

Your God-given role as nurturers has never been more needed. This gift is unique to your womanhood. Men are not so richly endowed with these gifts. The highest expression of this gift is motherhood, but it is also manifested in many other ways. One of these is the great intuition enjoyed by women. One of our faithful ward Relief Society presidents recalls a prompting she had:

“While attending my meetings, I had a strong feeling that I should check on an inactive sister in my ward. My first thought was, ‘I’m in charge; I can’t leave.’ But then I thought, ‘What would Christ do?’ Of course He would leave the meeting and go to His lost sheep. So I went. As I arrived at this sister’s home, I told her, ‘I don’t know why I’m here, but are you okay?’ She said she was fine. But I persisted. If the Lord had sent me, I knew I couldn’t just leave.

“She invited me in, and I found out on that Easter Sunday that her husband had left her earlier that week. Her children had been wondering where their daddy was. And she prayed for help for the first time in a long while. We were then able to get her family involved, and our bishop and his counselor came and helped mend the crisis so that the family got back together again.

“This experience taught me the importance of listening to the Spirit and following the promptings when they come. I’ve learned much from my experience of ‘leaving the ninety and nine’ to go and ‘find the one.’”⁵

How can any faithful sister in this Church feel that she is unimportant if she is to do the work which the Savior did? Inherent in this is the forgetting of self and the serving of others.

A single friend of ours who lives alone broke her shoulder and needed help. Word soon spread throughout her ward, and ward members brought dinners by the dozen so that she had to tell them to stop because her refrigerator was overflowing. One of them was a nearly blind sister who crossed a busy street with a hot dinner on a tray. Another sister volunteered to help clean her apartment. Seeing our friend’s reluctance, she countered, “How else can I show you that I love you?” Another sister who helped with grocery shopping saw the bright side of our friend’s accident as she pointed out, “This opportunity has brought us close to each other again!” These sisters all had the vision of the work the Savior had in mind for them to do.

Since the very beginning, much of the strength of the Church has come through the service, faith, and devotion of the faithful women of the Church. As the noble daughters of God, the sisters over the years have stood firm and true in the spirit of faith. My wife’s mother, Elizabeth Hamilton Wright, had seven children and was pregnant with her eighth child when her husband was called on a mission. She was left with the responsibility of the family and, with the help of one hired man, seeing that 16 cows were milked every day, that the garden was planted and harvested, the berries picked, and the family taken care of. She was a woman of deep faith and love of the Lord. Her faith never wavered all of the days of her life. It gave her strength to do the work which the Savior had for her to do and to meet the needs of her growing family even in her husband’s absence.

Sisters, your counsel and advice and input are needed in the Church. For many years I have been privileged to sit in the Welfare Executive Committee meetings with Sister Elaine Jack and with Sister Jack have enjoyed the presence and contribution of Sister Chieko Okazaki and Sister Aileen Clyde in the General Welfare meetings. Their wisdom is great and their contribution is vital. Their ideas and thoughts are so very much needed and appreciated.

You sisters who sit in the ward and stake councils should feel free to share your special wisdom and experience

in those councils. Then, when the bishop or stake president makes a decision, all will wish to support it.

You are appreciated and valued far more than you realize. We are mindful of your many challenges, which are often overwhelming and exhausting in this unsettled world. These challenges come in many forms to each of you. There is usually not enough money to make ends meet. Some sisters struggle with health problems. Some do not have spiritual well-being all of the time. Others are diminished by age or other infirmities. You mothers deal with tremendous challenges in meeting the needs of diverse personalities in your families. This is particularly true of single mothers. Some suffer because of wayward children or grandchildren. Others care for disabled members of the family. Others grieve over losses such as the death of a loved one. Some find themselves in a condition of loneliness. Amidst all of this, constant, subtle voices would divert you from your divine destiny.

Despite all of this, greater blessings are coming to women than ever before. In my lifetime, the drudgery of caring for a home and family has been greatly reduced. I remember my grandmother's old washboard, which was used to scrub clothes by hand. She cooked hot meals winter and summer on a wood-burning stove. I remember the coming of electricity to our small town and all of the marvelous advantages that it brought. Women now have never had greater opportunities for education and travel. But in the eternal scheme of things, your role is infinitely more vital, and it carries the promise of spiritual blessings greater than these temporal blessings.

Part of the problem is for us to live the eternal principles faithfully every day. One of the sisters with whom I am privileged to associate had this to say:

“Sundays were difficult when my children were small—getting them ready and then having them sit through three hours of meetings. Often they became tired, hungry, or even bored because the meetings were geared to an adult level. Sometimes I wondered if it was worth the effort. I seldom felt spiritually fed because I was trying so hard to help my children be reverent.

“Looking back now, I can see that those early Church experiences for my children were the beginnings of a firm foundation upon which they could continue to build. Because they were there each week, they gradually learned the importance of the sacrament; they learned to listen, to be reverent, to recognize the sweet feelings of the Spirit; and their testimonies began to blossom. I recognize that this is a unique and precious time for us when our children are small and need our guidance. Now my children are grown I can clearly see that my constant, repetitive efforts were worthwhile.”⁶

To meet the challenges of the eternal every day, every sister will be strengthened by daily communion with our Heavenly Father through prayer. Scriptural study will be beneficial in bringing spiritual reassurances. Attending sacrament meeting, partaking of the sacred emblems, and the renewal of our covenants will be a weekly source of strength.

The sisters who try to cope with the myriad of challenges of our complex times can benefit from the sisterhood of the Church more than ever before. The words of Sister Lucy Mack Smith in one of the first meetings of the Relief Society are as relevant today as when first spoken. She said, “We must cherish one another, watch over one another, comfort one another and gain instruction, that we may all sit down in heaven together.”⁷

Three sisters who live on an island near Tavira, Portugal, are so committed to attending Church meetings that

each Sunday finds them walking half a mile to a waterway, where they are rowed across, then walking another five miles to the chapel. Sister Pereira is 62, Sister Neves is 73, and Sister Jesus is 84. These sisters get together every day to read the scriptures and strengthen each other spiritually.⁸

The bearing of testimony benefits both the one testifying as well as the one listening. Regular temple attendance will help us meet all our challenges. Accepting calls from priesthood leaders as well as visiting teaching assignments from the Relief Society president will be a great strengthening experience. In rendering compassionate service individually and as a group, you lose sight of your own problems and do the work the Savior did.

Recently I met with a family who had lost a precious son through an unfortunate automobile accident. They wondered when the comforting spirit of the Holy Ghost would envelop them to sustain them. My counsel was that when they were prepared to say to the Lord, “Thy will be done,” then would come the sweet peace which the Savior promised. This willing submission to the Father is what the Savior exemplified in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Sisters, we live in the greatest time in the history of the Church. Your opportunities to serve and bless others are endless. Your contribution to the work of God has never been greater. Your unique and special contributions are greatly needed to strengthen our homes, to teach our children and youth, and to help others. Your example of righteousness is indispensable to the onrolling of the kingdom of God.

May God bless each of you, my dear sisters, for all you are and all you do. May His peace attend you. I testify that we are all in this holy work of God. We cannot deny the evidence of this as we see it roll forth throughout the world. I love the Lord and am humbled to be engaged in this holy work with you. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (1976), 239.

2. *Teachings*, 226.

3. *Teachings*, 227.

4. *Teachings*, 226–27.

5. From personal files.

6. From personal files.

7. Relief Society Minutes of Nauvoo, 24 Mar. 1842; in *History of Relief Society 1842–1966* (1966), 20.

8. As told by Erma Adams Kunzler, former missionary in Portugal.

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