

# We Are Women of God

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Coming unto Christ means walking away from the world. It means placing Christ and Christ only at the center of our lives.

Recently a professional assignment required me to travel out of the country. But I felt such a foreboding about the trip that prior to leaving I sought a priesthood blessing. I was warned that the adversary would attempt to thwart my mission and that physical and spiritual danger lay ahead. I was also counseled that this was not to be a sight-seeing or a shopping trip and that if I would focus on my assignments and seek the direction of the Spirit, I would return safely home.

Well, the warning was sobering. But as I proceeded, pleading for direction and protection each step of the way, I realized that my experience wasn't all that unique. Might not our Father have said to you and to me as we left His presence: "The adversary will attempt to thwart your mission, and you will face spiritual and physical danger. But if you will focus on your assignments, if you will heed my voice, and if you will refuse to reduce mortality to a sight-seeing or a shopping trip, you will return safely home"?

The adversary is delighted when we act like sightseers, meaning those who are hearers rather than doers of the word (see James 1:22), or shoppers, meaning those preoccupied with the vain things of this world that suffocate our spirits. Satan baits us with perishable pleasures and preoccupations—our bank accounts, our wardrobes, even our waistlines—for he knows that where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also (see Matt. 6:21). Unfortunately, it is easy to let the blinding glare of the adversary's enticements distract us from the light of Christ. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Matt. 16:26).

Prophets have admonished us to forsake the world and turn our hearts to Jesus Christ, who promised us, "In this world your joy is *not* full, but in *me* your joy is full" (D&C 101:36; emphasis added). Said President Spencer W. Kimball, "If we insist on spending all our time and resources building up ... a worldly kingdom, that is exactly what we will inherit" ("The False Gods We Worship," *Ensign*, June 1976, 6). How often are we so focused on pursuing the so-called good life that we lose sight of eternal life? It is the fatal spiritual equivalent of selling our birthright for a mess of pottage.

The Lord revealed the remedy for such spiritual disaster when He counseled Emma Smith to "lay aside the things of this world, and seek for the things of a better" (D&C 25:10). And Christ provided the pattern, declaring prior to Gethsemane, "I have *overcome* the world" (John 16:33; emphasis added). The only way that *we* may overcome the world is by coming unto Christ. And coming unto Christ means walking away from the world. It means placing Christ and Christ only at the center of our lives so that the vanities and philosophies of men lose their addictive appeal. Satan is the god of Babylon, or this world. Christ is the God of Israel, and His Atonement gives us power to overcome the world. "If you expect glory, intelligence and endless lives," said President Joseph F. Smith, "*let the world go*" (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* [1998], 243; emphasis added).

As sisters in Zion we can be obstacles to the adversary's conspiracy against families and virtue. No wonder he

tempts us to settle for earthly pleasures rather than to seek for eternal glory. A 45-year-old mother of six told me recently that when she stopped poring over magazines that plagued her with images of how her home and wardrobe should look, she began to feel more at peace. She said, “I may be chubby, gray, and wrinkled, but I am a chubby, gray, wrinkled daughter of God, who knows me and loves me.”

Relief Society can help us turn away from the world, for its express purpose is to help sisters and their families come unto Christ. In that spirit, I join Sister Smoot and Sister Jensen in declaring who we are and in rejoicing in the announced refinements in Relief Society’s focus. We no longer have the luxury of spending our energy on anything that does not lead us and our families to Christ. That is the litmus test for Relief Society, as well as for our lives. In the days ahead, a casual commitment to Christ will not carry us through.

As a young girl I saw commitment in my grandmother, who helped Grandpa homestead our farm on the Kansas prairie. Somehow they outlasted the Dust Bowl, the Depression, and the tornadoes that terrorize the Great Plains. I’ve often wondered how Grandma put up with years of meager income and hard work and how she went on when her oldest son died in a tragic accident. Grandma’s life wasn’t easy. But do you know what I remember most about her? Her total joy in the gospel. She was never happier than when she was working on family history or teaching with her scriptures in hand. Grandma *had* laid aside the things of this world to seek for the things of a better.

To the world, my grandma was ordinary. But to me, she represents the unsung heroines of *this* century who lived up to their premortal promises and left a foundation of faith upon which we may build. Grandma wasn’t perfect, but she was a woman of God. Now it is for you and for me to carry forward the banner into the next century. *We are not women of the world. We are women of God.* And women of God will be among the greatest heroines of the 21st century. As President Joseph F. Smith proclaimed, it is not for us “to be led by the women of the world; it is for [us] to lead ... the women of the world, in everything that is praise-worthy” (*Teachings*, 184).

This is not to diminish the lives of countless good women throughout the world. *But we are unique.* We are unique because of our covenants, our spiritual privileges, and the responsibilities attached to both. We are endowed with power and gifted with the Holy Ghost. We have a *living* prophet to guide us, ordinances that bind us to the Lord and to each other, and the power of the priesthood in our midst. We understand where we stand in the great plan of happiness. And we know that God is our Father and that His Son is our unfailing Advocate.

With these privileges comes great responsibility, for “unto whom much is given much is required” (D&C 82:3), and at times the demands of discipleship are heavy. But shouldn’t we expect the journey towards eternal glory to stretch us? We sometimes rationalize our preoccupation with this world and our casual attempts to grow spiritually by trying to console each other with the notion that living the gospel really shouldn’t require all that much of us. The Lord’s standard of behavior will always be more demanding than the world’s, but then the Lord’s rewards are infinitely more glorious—including true joy, peace, and salvation.

How then do we, as women of God, fill the full measure of our creation? The Lord rewards “them that diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6). We seek Him not only by studying and searching, by pleading and praying and watching always lest we enter into temptation, but by giving up worldly indulgences that straddle the line between God and mammon. Otherwise we risk being called but not chosen because our “hearts are set so much upon the things of this world” (D&C 121:35).

Consider the principle taught in the sequence of this scriptural injunction: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God

with all thy *heart*, with all thy might, mind, and strength” (D&C 59:5; emphasis added). What the Lord requires first is our hearts. Imagine how our choices would be affected if we loved the Savior above all else. How we would spend our time and money, or dress on a hot summer day, or respond to the call to visit teach and take care of one another, or react to media that offend the Spirit.

It is by letting the world go and coming unto Christ that we increasingly live as women of God. We were born for eternal glory. Just as faithful men were foreordained to hold the priesthood, we were foreordained to be women of God. We *are* women of faith, virtue, vision, and charity who rejoice in motherhood and in womanhood and in the family. We are not panicked about perfection, but we *are* working to become more pure. And we know that in the strength of the Lord we can do all righteous things because we have immersed ourselves in His gospel (see Alma 26:12). *I repeat, we cannot be women of the world, for we are latter-day women of God.* As President Kimball taught, “No greater recognition can come to [us] in this world than to be known as [women] of God” (“The Role of Righteous Women,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, 102).

This summer I had an unforgettable experience in the Holy Land. As I sat on the Mount of Beatitudes overlooking the Sea of Galilee, I saw in the distance a city built on a hill. The visual image of a city that cannot be hid was stunning, and as I pondered the symbolism I had an overwhelming impression that we as women of God are like that city, that if we will leave behind the things of the world and come unto Christ so that the Spirit radiates through our lives and from our eyes, our uniqueness will be a light unto the world. As sisters of Relief Society, we belong to the most significant community of women on this side of the veil. We *are* a spectacular city on a hill. And the less we look and act like the women of the world, the more they will look to us as a wellspring of hope, peace, virtue, and joy.

Twenty years ago at this very meeting President Kimball made a statement we have quoted ever since: “Much of the major growth that is coming to the Church in the last days ... will happen to the degree that the women of the Church reflect righteousness and articulateness in their lives and to the degree that [they] are seen as *distinct* and *different*—in happy ways—from the women of the world” (*Ensign*, Nov. 1979, 103–4; emphasis added). We can no longer be content to just quote President Kimball. We are the sisters who must and will make his prophecy a reality. But we can do it. I know we can.

President Gordon B. Hinckley said recently that “the eternal salvation of the world ... rests upon the shoulders of this Church. ... No other people in the history of the world have received ... [a] more compelling mandate ... , and we’d better be getting at it” (“Church Is Really Doing Well,” *Church News*, 3 July 1999, 3).

Women of God, that includes us. Tonight I invite each of us to identify at least one thing we can do to come out of the world and come closer to Christ. And then next month, another. And then another. Sisters, this is a call to arms, it’s a call to action, a call to arise. A call to arm ourselves with power and with righteousness. A call to rely on the arm of the Lord rather than the arm of flesh. A call to “arise and shine forth, that [our] light may be a standard for the nations” (D&C 115:5). A call to *live* as women of God so that we and our families may return safely home.

We have such cause to rejoice, for the gospel of Jesus Christ *is* the voice of gladness! It is because the Savior overcame the world that we may overcome. It is because He rose on the third day that we may arise as women of God. May we lay aside the things of this world and seek for the things of a better. May we commit this very hour to come out of the world and to never look back. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

