

We Are Instruments in the Hands of God

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We don't need a new program to spur us on—we need only incorporate the desire to share the gospel and reach out to new members and those who are less active.

My dear sisters, may I begin by telling you how much I love you. I feel grateful beyond expression to be part of this great sisterhood, which President Gordon B. Hinckley has said is a worldwide family of sisters. We *are* sisters, and I am constantly inspired by your faith, your goodness, and your desire to do what the Lord wants you to do. Thank you for your service, for your examples, and for truly being women of faith, virtue, vision, and charity. Everywhere I go, I see the fruits of Relief Society being manifest in the lives of the sisters of the Church. Each of us is an instrument in the hands of God.

I recently met a sister in Oregon who was brought back into activity because of a nurturing visiting teacher. Surely this visiting teacher must feel as Ammon and his brothers did when they rejoiced at having “been made instruments in the hands of God” (Alma 26:3) in bringing the knowledge of Christ to Lamanites who had “been strangers to God” (Alma 26:9). For “the worth of souls is great in the sight of God” (D&C 18:10).

In more than 165 countries of the world, our sisters are being instruments in the hands of God. I think of a ward in Brazil that has an influx of new members every week. The sisters in that Relief Society decided to set a goal to not let even one week pass without each newly baptized sister receiving a visit in her home and a copy of “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” and the Relief Society Declaration. So far they haven't lost any sisters to inactivity.

I marvel at an inspired ward Relief Society president in Korea who decided to visit every less-active sister in her ward. To date she has visited 25 sisters, and all but 3 of them have come back to church.

Sisters such as these are living testaments to President Hinckley's statement that “no calling in this church is ... of little consequence. All of us in the pursuit of our duty touch the lives of others. ...

“... Whatever your calling, it is as fraught with the same kind of opportunity to accomplish good as is mine. ... Our work is to go about doing good as did [the Master]” (“This Is the Work of the Master,” *Ensign*, May 1995, 71).

Truly, we may *each* be an instrument in the hands of God. Happily, we need not all be the same kind of instrument. Just as the instruments in an orchestra differ in size, shape, and sound, we too are different from one another. We have different talents and inclinations, but just as the French horn cannot duplicate the sound of the piccolo, neither is it necessary for us to all serve the Lord in the same way. Sister Eliza R. Snow said that “there is *no sister* so isolated and her sphere so narrow but what she can do a great deal towards establishing the Kingdom of God upon the earth” (*Woman's Exponent*, 15 Sept. 1873, 62; emphasis added). Our privilege and our responsibility as daughters of God and as sisters of Relief Society, then, is to become the most effective instruments *we* can be.

Relief Society can help us. The Prophet Joseph, who organized the Relief Society in 1842, made it clear that the purpose of this divinely inspired organization was to not only “relieve the poor, but to save souls” (*History of the Church*, 5:25). Since its earliest days Relief Society has done incalculable good. The Relief Society provided the first carload of flour that reached survivors of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and later provided wheat to the United States government during World Wars I and II. Last year our sisters donated more than 140,000 quilts to help those in distress. We have championed motherhood and the family, waged war against illiteracy, and rendered untold hours of service throughout the world. But my declaration to you tonight is that our most crucial work lies ahead as we join with our priesthood leaders to help move the kingdom of God forward.

Sisters, we are needed here—by the Lord, by our priesthood leaders, by our families, and by each other. The Lord needs us to embrace our eternal callings and fill the measure of our creation. He needs us to come home to Relief Society and look for ways to serve others in the name of His organization for women and to work together as sisters in helping the gospel kingdom move forward. Truly, Relief Society will help each of us serve our families and each other in ways that no other club or organization can.

President Spencer W. Kimball said: “In the world before we came here, faithful women were given certain assignments. ... While we do not now remember the particulars, this does not alter the glorious reality of what we once agreed to. [We] are accountable for those things which long ago were expected of [us]” (“The Role of Righteous Women,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, 102).

So how do we do it? Amid the pressures of life, how do we become the most effective instruments we can be in the hands of the Lord? There is a great deal about this that we can learn from the sons of Mosiah and from the Relief Society Declaration.

Number 1. Our own conversion must come first. The most important conversion for any of us is our own. If we are to bring the light of the gospel into others’ lives, it must shine brightly in our own. Once converted, the sons of Mosiah labored without ceasing to share the gospel with others, “for they could not bear that any human soul should perish” (Mosiah 28:3). Only when *we* are converted to the Lord Jesus Christ are we in a position to strengthen others. And only then do we begin to understand that our lives truly do have meaning, purpose, and direction, and that as sisters united in our devotion to Jesus Christ our calling is to be a light to the world.

Number 2. Like the sons of Mosiah, we must wax “strong in the knowledge of the truth” (Alma 17:2). These brothers continually studied the gospel. Through fasting and prayer and immersing themselves in the scriptures, they came to know that Jesus is the Christ, and they learned to hear His voice.

Likewise, as sisters of the Relief Society we should strive to increase our testimonies of Jesus Christ through prayer and scripture study and to seek spiritual strength by following the promptings of the Holy Ghost.

It is almost impossible to be an effective instrument within our own families, with our neighbors, or even from the pulpit unless we can discern the whisperings of the Holy Ghost. Ammon was able to perceive the thoughts of the Lamanite king because he was living close to the Lord (see Alma 18:16).

Our ability to hear the voice of the Spirit is dependent upon our willingness to keep the commandments, for “when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated” (D&C 130:21). If we want to experience the inexpressible joy of gospel living and feel of Christ’s atoning mercies, obedience to all, and not just a select few, of God’s commandments is the only way.

Have we received the immeasurable blessings of holding weekly family home evening and daily scripture study and prayer? Do we understand the far-reaching blessings of keeping our covenants and filling our minds with only that which is “virtuous, lovely, or of good report”? (A of F 1:13). When obedience becomes a quest, it is no longer an irritation.

Relief Society can help us abide by divine laws and become closer to God. Imagine what goodness will fill the earth when, under the direction of the priesthood, this circle of righteous women unite to bring to pass righteous purposes! When we unitedly serve each other and all of our Father’s children, we can be instruments in the hands of God, not only to relieve physical suffering but, more importantly, to succor those who are in need spiritually.

Number 3. Service is a key to being an effective instrument. The sons of Mosiah chose to serve the Lamanites rather than assume leadership of their father’s kingdom. And in many instances, their service softened the hearts of the Lamanites and made them receptive to the gospel. When Lamoni’s servants were busy recounting Ammon’s exploits in fending off marauders, Ammon himself was in the stable feeding the horses and serving the king (see Alma 18:9–10).

We, too, delight in service and good works. Service softens and opens hearts, for it is truly the gospel in action. I know of a ward in Arizona where three families are currently investigating the Church, all as a direct result of compassionate service rendered by the Relief Society.

Relief Society affords us countless opportunities to develop and exercise the pure love of Christ in all aspects of our lives. For example, home, family, and personal enrichment meeting provides an ideal setting to learn and serve together. Service is the gospel of Jesus Christ in action, for service blesses both the giver and the receiver. Will you look for ways to channel your service through the organization of the Relief Society, realizing that service is one of the most effective ways we can bless others temporally and spiritually?

Number 4. Love must undergird everything we do. As sisters of the Relief Society, we love the Lord, we love our families, we love life and learning, and we love one another. Lamoni’s father, who was king of the Lamanites, softened his heart when he saw how sincerely Ammon loved his son. Eventually Ammon’s love led to the conversion of Lamoni’s family (see Alma 20:26–27). Our greatest and first concern with regard to conversion, retention, and activation must be to our own family.

Once again, Relief Society can help. Sister Elsa Bluhm, who is 102, knew the gospel was true. She loved the Lord. She met a good man and married him. He was from Germany, and he was not a member of the Church. Her husband had never been taught to pray. When Elsa knelt beside the bed each night, she would take his hand in hers and pray. After many years he joined the Church, and they were sealed in the temple. Before his passing, Brother Bluhm became an instrument in the hands of God by researching his German ancestors.

This happy ending began with one woman’s insistent, loving, righteous example. Elsa invited the Spirit into their home and marriage by loving her husband and loving the Lord. She was both faithful and filled with faith, even when at times she felt alone. She was an instrument in the hands of God in her own home.

For each of us, our righteous examples may seem small, but by influence they are great. To all within your sphere of influence, “be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). Let others feel the peace and joy that gospel living brings you. Invite your friends not of

our faith or less-active members over for family home evening. Bring them to church and set an example of reverence for them. Let them see that you avoid movies or television shows or Internet sites that would drive the Spirit away and thus make us less-effective instruments.

President Hinckley has repeatedly asked us to become better missionaries, and Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has indicated that if the missionary program of the Church is to accomplish all it must, we as sisters must join in the effort.

We don't need a new program to spur us on—we need only incorporate the desire to share the gospel and reach out to new members and those who are less active in our existing programs. Whether we are serving as a visiting teacher or planning home, family, and personal enrichment meetings or teaching children in Primary or leading the youth, we can find ways to reach those who are new in the faith or whose faith has faltered or those who haven't yet found the truth. We can be instruments in helping gather the Lord's sheep back to the fold.

I know that we can. I know we can do it. We have brought warmth to tens of thousands of people around the world with our homemade quilts. We have demonstrated our willingness to serve and give and love. Now, let us find ways to give the gift of the gospel to those who need spiritual warmth.

When you return home this night, will you take a moment to write down impressions that come to your heart this evening? Will you think of specific ways you can be an instrument in the hands of God? Will you contemplate the blessings that await your obedience in this life and throughout eternity? And will you insert your name in the verse of this scripture and know with all of your soul that God loves you? "Continue in preaching for Zion, in the spirit of meekness, confessing me before the world; and I will bear [you] up as on eagles' wings; and [you] shall beget glory and honor to [yourself] and unto my name" (D&C 124:18). I know that the gospel is true. I know that this work is of the Lord. I know that Jesus is the Christ and we have a true prophet on the earth today. Sweet is the work. Of this I humbly bear witness, in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen.