

# You Are All Heaven Sent

**James E. Faust**

*Second Counselor in the First Presidency*



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You are the nurturers and the caregivers.

My beloved sisters, your presence is overwhelming, and I am humbled by it. We gratefully acknowledge the presence of President Hinckley and President Monson. The choir's music has lifted us greatly. Sister Sainz's prayer was an invitation for the Divine to be with us. The inspired messages of Sister Bonnie Parkin, Sister Kathleen Hughes, and Sister Anne Pingree have been exceptional. President Hinckley, President Monson, and I participated in setting apart and blessing these three sisters as the general presidency of the Relief Society. Their inspired charge is to lead this great organization of sisters under the direction of the priesthood. The blessings pronounced upon these three sisters collectively and individually were profound. As President Hinckley set apart Sister Parkin, he reminded the sisters, "The Prophet Joseph outlined the work of the Relief Society to reach out, to minister to the needs of the poor, the needy, the troubled and distressed, and to bless women."

Our theme tonight is "Lord, here am I; send me." This profoundly simple statement is so appropriate as I address you sisters this evening because so very many of you demonstrate so well this willingness to step forward and serve. You are all heaven sent. You are the beautiful adornment of the human race. Your role as sisters is special and unique in the Lord's work. You are the nurturers and the caregivers who have, as the Prophet Joseph Smith said, "feelings of charity and benevolence."<sup>1</sup>

I do not have words to express my respect, appreciation, and admiration for you wonderful sisters. The women of all ages in this Church have been endowed with a divine, uniquely feminine gift of grace. We are humbled by your acts of faith, devotion, obedience, and loving service, and your examples of righteousness. This Church could not have achieved its destiny without the dedicated, faithful women who, in their righteousness, have immeasurably strengthened the Church. Over the years the sisters of the Church have faced challenges as great as yours are today. Your challenges are different from those of your mother, grandmother, and great-grandmothers, but they are very real.

I rejoice that opportunities for women in the Church and in the world are increasing. We hope that you will enhance these expanding opportunities by bringing to them your sublime feminine touch. These opportunities are really without limit. When the Prophet Joseph established this organization, he "turned the key for the emancipation of womankind," and "it was turned for all the world."<sup>2</sup> Since that key was turned in 1842, more knowledge has come to the earth and to women than has come in all of the history of the world.

Over the years, this great society for women has evolved under inspiration, but the basic work of the Relief Society has not changed. The Prophet Joseph stated very succinctly that your work is "not only to relieve the

poor, but to save souls.”<sup>3</sup>

I believe the four great enduring concepts of this society are:

First, it is a divinely established sisterhood.

Second, it is a place of learning.

Third, it is an organization whose basic charter is to serve others. Its motto is “Charity never faileth.”

Fourth, it is a place where women can socialize and establish eternal friendships.<sup>4</sup>

I am pleased that you younger sisters have the opportunity of participating in Relief Society at age 18. You will benefit greatly from your membership in this vital organization. Your lives will be blessed as you willingly participate with the sisters in compassionate service and in caregiving. The Relief Society curriculum is focused on basic doctrine and will give you the opportunity to study the gospel and increase your spirituality. The curriculum is relevant for all mankind, not just wives and mothers. All sisters, including you younger sisters, need to be “remembered and nourished by the good word of God.”<sup>5</sup> Doctrine will strengthen you and help you to develop the spirituality necessary to overcome the challenges of life.

A young lady who is very close to me made the following observation: “I am 18 and the youngest member of the Relief Society in our ward. I enjoy going to Relief Society with my mother and grandmother because it is so nice to spend time with them as friends. I like to listen to my mom talk to her friends because it gives me an opportunity to get to know the sisters who are her age. There are several ladies who like to give me a hug and ask me where I am working and what I am doing during the summer. They always make me feel like I am important and special to them. As I have associated with the grandmothers and great-grandmothers in my ward, I have developed new and unique friendships which have enriched and blessed my life. I also like the lessons the older sisters give. They have lived in different locations and their individual experiences have given me better insight on how to handle life’s challenges and problems. The stories they share from their own lives are interesting and help me relate to the lesson. I have come to realize that Relief Society truly is for all women, regardless of their ages.”<sup>6</sup>

No matter what circumstances you sisters experience, your influence can be marvelously far-reaching. I believe some of you have a tendency to underestimate your profound capacity for blessing the lives of others. More often than not, it is not on the stage with some public pronouncement but in your example of righteousness and the countless gentle acts of love and kindness done so willingly, so often on a one-to-one basis.

The Lord’s special concern for widows is abundantly evidenced in the scriptures. Of course this concern also extends to all single mothers. They have so many demands placed upon them. They must provide the food and clothing and other necessities for the family. They also need to nurture their children with an extra amount of love and caring.

I recently received a letter from the son of a sister in this circumstance, and I quote a paragraph from it: “Mom was able to be a full-time homemaker while our family was young. This is where she wanted to be, but some 28 years ago, with four children ages 5 to 14, she was forced to take on employment outside the home in order to provide for us as a suddenly single parent. While we know this is not the ideal situation for raising a family, Mom worked diligently to continue nurturing us in the gospel and tending to all family duties while working full-time

to support us financially. Only now as a parent myself, blessed to have my wife at home to care for our children, have I begun to understand the scope of Mom's situation and trials in caring for us at that time. It was difficult and trying and I wish that I had done more to make things easier for her. I will be eternally grateful for her sacrifice in setting an example by teaching us how to work and how we should live. The wisdom of the proclamation on the family rings especially true to me now because of the experiences we shared as a family."<sup>7</sup>

Many faithful, righteous sisters have not had the opportunity for marriage, yet they have always been a vital and necessary part of this sacred work. These wonderful women have a distinct errand of influence as angels of mercy to parents, sisters, brothers, nieces, and nephews, as well as other family members and friends. In the Church there are endless opportunities to love and nurture. The single sisters, who may have more time, serve so superbly well.

Sister Margaret Anderson of Centerville, Utah, is a wonderful example of a single sister who has lived an exemplary and fulfilling life in the service of others. For many years, she lovingly cared for her aged mother, her aunt, and her disabled sister. She guided and influenced hundreds of children as an elementary school teacher. Now retired, she continues to volunteer each week, helping children learn to read. Her acts of service have been a special blessing to the members of her ward. One young lady commented: "When I was little, Margaret would make me a birthday cake every year. She would decorate the frosting with the activities that I had done the previous year, such as dancing or playing soccer." Not one missionary leaves from her ward without one of Margaret's leatherwork wallets. She is a valuable resource as a gospel scholar, particularly in Relief Society. For her neighbors and friends, she has willingly run errands, and driven them to the temple. Margaret is a gracious hostess. She makes delicious candies and paints beautiful pictures, which she enjoys sharing with others. She truly has blessed the lives of countless individuals.

The prophets of the Lord have repeatedly promised that no blessing will be denied to the righteous single sisters of the Church if, through no fault of their own, they have not been married in this life and sealed to a worthy priesthood holder. They will be able to enjoy that blessing forever in the next world. "On occasions when you ache for that acceptance and affection which belong to family life on earth, please know that our Father in Heaven is aware of your anguish, and that one day he will bless you beyond your capacity to express."<sup>8</sup>

Following the dedication of the magnificent new temple in Nauvoo, we rode home on the airplane with Sister Parkin, Sister Hughes, Sister Pingree, and their noble husbands. I asked the sisters if they had gone to the red brick store in Nauvoo where the Prophet Joseph established the Relief Society on March 17, 1842, with only 20 members present. Sister Parkin responded that they indeed had.

As I was speaking to them, I was forcefully reminded that all of the sisters anywhere in the world can inherit and benefit from the blessings of the Lord for women. The Prophet Joseph Smith said: "I now turn the key to you in the name of God. ... Knowledge and intelligence shall flow down from this time."<sup>9</sup> This blessing of knowledge and intelligence comes to all righteous women in the Church, regardless of their race or nationality, and irrespective of whether they are new in the Church or descendants of one of the first 20 members in Nauvoo in 1842. These blessings flow to those sisters who willingly perform the work of angels.

I recently heard Elder Dieter Uchtdorf make the following insightful statement: "None of my family lines come through Nauvoo. I cannot trace my lineage to the pioneers. But like the majority of Church members around the world, I can deeply connect with all my heart to the Saints of Nauvoo and their journey to Zion. The continuing

effort of blazing my own religious trail to a Zion of ‘the pure in heart’ makes me feel close to the 19th-century pioneers. They are my spiritual ancestry, as they are for each and every member of the Church, regardless of nationality, language, or culture. They have established not only a safe place in the West but also the spiritual foundation for the building of the kingdom in all the nations of the world.”

Now a word to you sisters who are married. In a very substantial way, you sisters make our homes a refuge of peace and happiness in a troubled world. A righteous husband is the bearer of the priesthood, which priesthood is the governing authority of the home. But he is not the priesthood; he is the holder of the priesthood.<sup>10</sup> His wife shares the blessings of the priesthood with him. He is not elevated in any way above the divine status of his wife. President Gordon B. Hinckley in last April’s general priesthood meeting stated: “In the marriage companionship there is neither inferiority nor superiority. The woman does not walk ahead of the man; neither does the man walk ahead of the woman. They walk side by side as a son and daughter of God on an eternal journey.”

He went on to say: “I am confident that when we stand before the bar of God, there will be little mention of how much wealth we have accumulated in life or of any honors which we may have achieved. But there will be searching questions concerning our domestic relations. And I am convinced that only those who have walked through life with love and respect and appreciation for their companions and children will receive from our eternal judge the words, ‘Well done, thou good and faithful servant: ... enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.’”<sup>11</sup>

The wives who sustain their husbands in bishoprics, stake presidencies, and other priesthood callings are a great blessing to the Church. They serve behind the scenes quietly but effectively, supporting the family and home while their husbands are ministering to the Saints. I said “quietly.” I’ve heard it said that some women like a strong silent man—they think he’s listening!

No one knows more than I what strength a supportive wife can be. Since our marriage, my Ruth has sustained and encouraged me in the many callings I have had for almost 60 years. I could not have served one day without her loving support. I am most grateful to her and love her deeply.

The widow of one of my missionary associates, Sister Effie Dean Bowman Rich, is very busy with her family and with two businesses. In addition, she is a mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother of a large family. Some time ago, as she was struggling to meet the demands of these multiple roles, she said, “What I need is a wife!” Of course, what she meant was that she felt the need for support from someone who would take care of the countless details a righteous, caring wife handles so well.

Sisters, whatever your circumstances, you all need to have oil in your lamps. This means being prepared. We all remember the parable of the ten virgins who had been invited to a wedding supper. Five were wise and prepared, with oil in their lamps, to meet the bridegroom; the other five were not. All ten trimmed their lamps, but five had not taken enough oil with them and had run out. We all need the light of our lamps to get us through the darkness. We all want to meet the Bridegroom and attend the wedding feast.

A few years ago, President Spencer W. Kimball clarified this tragedy of unpreparedness. He said the five foolish virgins in the parable “had been taught. They had been warned all their lives.” During the day both wise and foolish seemed alike, but “at the darkest hour, when least expected, the bridegroom came.” The five whose lamps had gone out rushed out to get the needed oil, but by the time they reached the banquet hall, the door was shut. It was too late.

President Kimball explained that “the foolish asked the others to share their oil, but spiritual preparedness cannot be shared in an instant. The wise had to go, else the bridegroom would have gone unwelcomed. They needed all their oil for themselves; they could not save the foolish.”

“In [this] parable,” he continued, “oil can be purchased at the market. In our lives the oil of preparedness is accumulated drop by drop in righteous living. Attendance at sacrament meetings adds oil to our lamps, drop by drop over the years. Fasting, family prayer, home teaching, control of bodily appetites, preaching the gospel, studying the scriptures—each act of dedication and obedience is a drop added to our store. Deeds of kindness, payment of offerings and tithes, chaste thoughts and actions, marriage in the covenant for eternity—these, too, contribute importantly to the oil with which we can at midnight refuel our exhausted lamps.”<sup>12</sup>

Sisters, it is important that you have oil in your lamps so that when you say to the Lord, “Here am I; send me,” you are prepared and qualified to be sent. We are all heaven sent, but what we are able to accomplish in the Lord’s work depends to a large extent on our willingness and ability.

My testimony, based upon 59 years of family life, is that my Ruth’s participation in Relief Society has brought enriched spirituality and harmony to our home. This divinely inspired organization has not only blessed her life but also the lives of each of our family members. Involvement in Relief Society can help you replenish the oil in your lamps. It can provide for you much of the stability and stamina you will need as you weather the storms of life and journey through mortality.

When the first press conference was held after President Hinckley was ordained and set apart as the President of the Church, someone asked the President to comment upon the challenge of mothers who have to work and also balance the many needs of their homes and families. President Hinckley replied, “Do the best you can, and remember that the greatest asset you have in this world is those children, whom you’ve brought into the world, and for whose nurture and care you are responsible.”<sup>13</sup> I repeat that tonight. Do the best you can to help all of us reach higher and do better. Use your innate spiritual gifts to bless. Help us push back the pernicious influences of the world in our lives, our homes, and in the Church.

May the promise of Nephi be fulfilled in your behalf: “And they were armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory.”<sup>14</sup> I wish to bear testimony of the blessings that have come into my life from the love of my wife, Ruth, my Christlike mother, saintly grandmothers, our daughters and granddaughters, and many other righteous women. I do so in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (1976), 226.

2. George Albert Smith, *Relief Society Magazine*, Dec. 1945, 717; see also *History of the Church*, 4:607.

3. *History of the Church*, 5:25.

4. See D&C 130:2.

5. Moro. 6:4.

6. Personal letter.

7. Personal letter from Brad Allen.

8. Spencer W. Kimball, "The Role of Righteous Women," *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, 103.

9. Minutes of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo, 28 Apr. 1842.

10. See D&C 121:37; Hyrum M. Smith and Janne M. Sjodahl, *The Doctrine and Covenants Commentary*, rev. ed. (1951), 759.

11. "Personal Worthiness to Exercise the Priesthood," *Ensign*, May 2002, 54; *Liahona*, July 2002, 60.

12. *Faith Precedes the Miracle* (1972), 255–56.

13. Audiovisual transcript of press conference, 13 Mar. 1995, courtesy of the Public Affairs Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

14. 1 Ne. 14:14.