

Turn On Your Light

October 2017 General Conference

By Sharon Eubank
First Counselor in the Relief Society General Presidency

The prophets are calling on us, my sisters. Will you be righteous? Will you articulate your faith? Will you turn on your light?

You might not know this, but President Monson and I are twins. On the very day I was born—in the very hour—in Northern California, the 36-year-old Thomas S. Monson was sustained as the newest Apostle. I love my special, personal link to the prophet of God, President Monson.

The prophets are speaking about women.¹ You will hear some of their words in this meeting. For my text I am going back almost 40 years to a remarkable prophecy written by President Spencer W. Kimball. September 1979 was only the second time the women of the global Church had met in their own general meeting. President Kimball had prepared his talk, but when the day of the conference came, he was in the hospital. So instead, he asked his wife, Camilla Eyring Kimball, to read his remarks on his behalf.²

Sister Kimball read the prophet's words, which emphasized the influence of LDS women on the good women of the world prior to the Second Coming of the Savior. Near the end, there was an electrifying charge to the women of the Church that we have been talking about ever since.

Let me quote a little of what President Kimball said:

"Finally, my dear sisters, may I suggest to you something that has not been said before or at least in quite this way. 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 ... 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 and to the degree that the women of the Church are seen as distinct and different—in happy ways—from the women of the world.

"Among the real heroines in the world who will come into the Church are women who are more concerned with being righteous than with being selfish. These real heroines have true humility, which places a higher value on integrity than on visibility. ...

"... It will be ... female exemplars of the Church [who] will be a *significant force* in both the numerical and the spiritual growth of the Church in the last days."³

What a prophetic statement that is. Just to summarize:

- It will be the good relationships of women that will trigger much of the major growth coming to the Church in the years ahead.
- The friendships that Relief Society women, young women, and Primary girls build with sincere, faithful, godly women and girls of other faiths and beliefs will be a *significant force* in how the Church grows in the last days.
- President Kimball called these women from other backgrounds “heroines” who will be more concerned with being righteous than selfish, who will show us that integrity is more valuable than visibility.

I have met so many of these good women as I do my work around the world. Their friendships are precious to me. You know them too among your friends and neighbors. They may or may not be members of the Church right now, but we connect in friendship that is very important. Well, how do we play our part? What should we do? President Kimball refers to five things:

The first is to be righteous. Being righteous doesn’t mean being perfect or never making mistakes. It means developing an inner connection with God, repenting of our sins and mistakes, and freely helping others.

Women who have repented change the course of history. I have a friend who was in a car accident when she was young, and from that, she became addicted to pain medication. Later on, her parents divorced. She became pregnant from a brief relationship, and her addictions continued. But one night, she looked at the chaos and mess of her life and thought, “Enough.” She cried out to the Savior Jesus Christ to help her. She said she learned that Jesus Christ was stronger than even her terrible circumstances and that she could rely on His strength as she walked the road of repentance.

By coming back to the Lord and His ways, she changed the course of her history and her little boy’s history and her new husband’s. She is righteous; she has a wide-open heart for others who have made mistakes and want to change. And just like all of us, she isn’t perfect, but she knows how to repent and to keep trying.

The second is to be articulate. Being articulate means to clearly express how you feel about something and why. Earlier this year, there was a post on my Facebook news feed that disparaged Christianity. I read it and I was a little annoyed, but I shrugged it off. But an acquaintance who is not a member of our faith responded with a comment of her own. She wrote: “[This is] the exact opposite of what Jesus stood for—he was ... radical [in] his time because he ... equalized the world. ... He [spoke to] prostitute[s], [he ate] with ... tax collector[s] ... , befriended powerless women and children ... , [and] gave us the story of the Good Samaritan. ... It follows that ... true

Christians would be striving to be the MOST loving people in the world.” When I read that, I thought to myself, “Why didn’t I write that?”

Each of us needs to be better at articulating the reasons for our faith. How do you feel about Jesus Christ? Why do you stay in the Church? Why do you believe the Book of Mormon is scripture? Where do you get your peace? Why does it matter that the prophet has something to say in 2017? How do you know he is a real prophet? Use your voice and your power to articulate what you know and feel—on social media, in quiet conversations with your friends, when you’re chatting with your grandchildren. Tell them why you believe, what it feels like, if you ever doubted, how you got through it, and what Jesus Christ means to you. As the Apostle Peter said, “Be not afraid ... ; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.”⁴

The third is to be different. Let me tell you a story that happened this July on Panama City Beach in Florida.⁵ Late in the afternoon, Roberta Ursrey saw her two young sons screaming for help from 100 yards (90 m) out into the ocean. They had become caught in a strong current and were being carried out to sea. A nearby couple tried to rescue the boys, but they also got caught in the current. So members of the Ursrey family dove in to rescue the struggling swimmers, and quickly nine people were caught in the rip current.

There were no ropes. There was no lifeguard. The police sent for a rescue boat, but the people had been out in the ocean struggling for 20 minutes, and they were exhausted and their heads were slipping under the water. Among the onlookers on the beach was Jessica Mae Simmons. Her husband had the idea to form a human chain. They shouted at people on the beach to help them, and dozens of people linked arms and marched into the ocean. Jessica wrote, “To see people from different races and genders come into action to help TOTAL strangers [was] absolutely amazing to see!!”⁶ An 80-person chain stretched toward the swimmers. Look at this picture of that incredible moment.

Everyone on the beach could think only of traditional solutions, and they were paralyzed. But one couple, in a split second, thought of a different solution. Innovation and creation are spiritual gifts. When we keep our covenants, it may make us different from others in our culture and society, but it gives us access to inspiration so we can think of different solutions, different approaches, different applications. We aren’t always going to fit in with the world, but being different in positive ways can be a lifeline to others who are struggling.

The fourth is to be distinct. Distinct means to be recognizably well defined. Let me go back to the story about Jessica Mae Simmons on the beach. Once that human chain was stretching toward the swimmers, she knew she could help. Jessica Mae said, “I can hold my breath ... and go around an Olympic pool with ease! [I knew how to get out of a rip current.] I knew I could get [each swimmer] to the human chain.”⁷ She and her husband grabbed boogie boards and swam down the chain until they and another

rescuer reached the swimmers, and then they ferried them one by one back to the chain, who passed them to the safety of the beach. Jessica had a distinct skill: she knew how to swim against a rip current.

The restored gospel is recognizably well defined. But we have to be distinct about how we follow it. Just as Jessica practiced swimming, we need to practice living the gospel before the emergency so that, unafraid, we will be strong enough to help when others are being swept away by the current.

And finally, the fifth is to do one through four in happy ways. Being happy doesn't mean to slap a plastic smile on your face no matter what is going on. But it does mean keeping the laws of God and building and lifting others.⁸ When we build, when we lift the burden of others, it blesses our lives in ways our trials cannot take away. I have a quote by President Gordon B. Hinckley placed where I see it every day. He said: "You don't ... build out of pessimism or cynicism. You look with optimism, work with faith, and things happen."⁹

An example of that happy, optimistic spirit is a 13-year-old girl I know named Elsa, whose family is moving to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1,800 miles (2,900 km) away from her friends. It's not very easy when you are 13 to move to a new place. Elsa was understandably unsure about the move, so her dad gave her a blessing. At the very moment of the blessing, her mom's phone chimed with a text. The young women who live in Louisiana had sent this picture with the caption "Please move into our ward!"¹⁰

These young women were optimistic they would like Elsa without even meeting her. Their enthusiasm created optimism in Elsa about the upcoming move and answered her prayer about whether everything would be all right.

There is an energy that comes from happiness and optimism that doesn't just bless us—it builds everyone around us. Any small thing you do to light real happiness in others shows that you are already carrying the torch that President Kimball lit.

I was 15 years old at the time President Kimball's talk was given. We who are older than 40 have been carrying this charge from President Kimball ever since that day. Now I look out at the 8-year-olds, the 15-year-olds, the 20-year-olds, and the 35-year-olds, and I'm going to pass this torch to you. You are the future leaders in this Church, and it will be up to you to carry this light forward and be the fulfillment of this prophecy. We who are older than 40 link our arms through yours and feel your strength and energy. We need you.

Listen to this scripture found in Doctrine and Covenants 49:26–28. It may have been written under different circumstances, but tonight by the Holy Spirit, I hope you will take it as your personal call to this sacred work.

"Behold, I say unto you, go forth as I have commanded you; repent of all your sins; ask and ye shall receive; knock and it shall be opened unto you.

“Behold, I will go before you and be your rearward; and I will be in your midst, and you shall not be confounded.

“Behold, I am Jesus Christ, and I come quickly.”¹¹

I appeal to each of you to put yourself in a place where you can feel the generous love God has for you. You cannot put yourself beyond the reach of that love. When you feel His love, when you love Him, you will repent and keep His commandments. When you keep His commandments, He can use you in His work. His work and glory is the exaltation and eternal life of women and men.

The prophets are calling on us, my sisters. Will you be righteous? Will you articulate your faith? Can you bear being distinct and different? Will your happiness in spite of your trials draw others who are good and noble and who need your friendship? Will you turn on your light? I testify the Lord Jesus Christ will go before us and be in our midst.

I conclude with the words of our well-loved prophet, Thomas S. Monson: “My dear sisters, this is your day, this is your time.”¹² In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

© 2017 by Intellectual Reserve, Inc. All rights reserved.