

# Sisters' Participation in the Gathering of Israel

## October 2018 General Conference

By President Russell M. Nelson

I'm extending a prophetic plea to you, the women of the Church, to shape the future by helping to gather scattered Israel.

It is wonderful to be with you, my dear and precious sisters. Perhaps a recent experience will give you a glimpse into how I feel about you and the supernal abilities with which you are endowed.

One day while I was speaking to a congregation in South America, I became exceedingly excited about my topic, and at a pivotal moment, I said, "As the *mother* of 10 children, I can tell you that ..." And then I went on to complete my message.

I did not realize that I had said the word *mother*. My translator, assuming I had misspoken, changed the word *mother* to *father*, so the congregation never knew that I had referred to myself as *mother*. But my wife Wendy heard it, and she was delighted with my Freudian slip.

In that moment, the deep longing of my heart to make a difference in the world—like only a mother does—bubbled up from my heart. Through the years, whenever I have been asked why I *chose* to become a medical doctor, my answer has always been the same: "Because I could not *choose* to be a mother."

Please note that anytime I use the word *mother*, I am not talking only about women who have given birth or adopted children in this life. I am speaking about *all* of our Heavenly Parents' adult daughters. *Every* woman is a mother by virtue of her eternal divine destiny.

So tonight, as the *father* of 10 children—*nine daughters* and one son—and as President of the Church, I pray that you will sense how deeply I feel about you—about who you are and all the good you can do. No one can do what a righteous woman can do. No one can duplicate the influence of a mother.

Men can and often do communicate the love of Heavenly Father and the Savior to others. But women have a special gift for it—a divine endowment. You have the capacity to sense what someone needs—and *when* he or she needs it. You can reach out, comfort, teach, and strengthen someone in his or her very moment of need.

Women see things differently than men do, and oh, how we need your perspective! Your nature leads you to think of others *first*, to consider the effect that any course of action will have on others.

As President Eyring pointed out, it was our glorious Mother Eve—with her far-reaching vision of our Heavenly Father's plan—who initiated what we call "the Fall." Her wise and courageous choice and Adam's supporting decision moved God's plan of happiness forward. They made it

possible for each of us to come to earth, receive a body, and prove that we would choose to stand up for Jesus Christ *now*, just as we did premortally.

My dear sisters, you have special spiritual gifts and propensities. Tonight I urge you, with all the hope of my heart, to pray to understand *your spiritual gifts*—to cultivate, use, and expand them, even more than you ever have. You will change the world as you do so.

As women, you inspire others and set a standard worthy of emulation. Let me give you a little background on two of the major announcements made at our last general conference. You, my dear sisters, were key to each.

First, ministering. The supreme standard for ministering is that of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Generally, women are, and always have been, closer to that standard than men. When you are truly ministering, you follow your feelings to help someone else experience more of the Savior's love. The inclination to minister is inherent in righteous women. I know women who pray every day, "Whom wouldst Thou have me help today?"

Before the April 2018 announcement about the higher and holier way of caring for others, the tendency of some men was to check off their home teaching assignment as "done" and move on to the next task.

But when *you* sensed that a sister you visit taught needed help, you responded immediately and then throughout the month. Thus, it was *how* you visit taught that inspired our upward shift to ministering.

Second, in the last general conference, we also restructured Melchizedek Priesthood quorums. When we wrestled with how to help the men of the Church be more effective in their responsibilities, we carefully considered the example of the Relief Society.

In Relief Society, women in various ages and stages of life meet together. Each decade of life brings unique challenges, and yet, there *you* were, week after week, mingling together, growing and teaching the gospel together, and making a real difference in the world.

Now, following your example, Melchizedek Priesthood bearers are members of the elders quorum. These men range in age from 18 to 98 (maybe more), with equally wide-ranging priesthood and Church experiences. These brethren can now create stronger fraternal linkages, learn together, and bless others more effectively.

You remember that last June, Sister Nelson and I spoke to the youth of the Church. We invited them to enlist in the Lord's youth battalion to help gather Israel on both sides of the veil. This gathering is "*the greatest challenge, the greatest cause, and the greatest work on earth today*"!<sup>1</sup>

It is a cause that desperately needs women, because women shape the future. So tonight I'm extending a prophetic plea to you, the women of the Church, to shape the future by helping to gather scattered Israel.

Where can you start?

May I offer *four invitations*:

First, I invite you to participate in a 10-day fast from social media and from any other media that bring negative and impure thoughts to your mind. Pray to know which influences to remove

during your fast. The effect of your 10-day fast may surprise you. What do you notice after taking a break from perspectives of the world that have been wounding your spirit? Is there a change in where you *now* want to spend your time and energy? Have any of your priorities shifted—even just a little? I urge you to record and follow through with each impression.

Second, I invite you to read the Book of Mormon between now and the end of the year. As impossible as that may seem with all you are trying to manage in your life, if you will accept this invitation with full purpose of heart, the Lord will help you find a way to achieve it. And, as you prayerfully study, I promise that the heavens will open for you. The Lord will bless you with increased inspiration and revelation.

As you read, I would encourage you to mark each verse that speaks of or refers to the Savior. Then, be intentional about talking of Christ, rejoicing in Christ, and preaching of Christ with your families and friends.<sup>2</sup> You and they will be drawn closer to the Savior through this process. And changes, even miracles, will begin to happen.

This morning the announcement was made regarding the new Sunday schedule and home-centered, Church-supported curriculum. You, my dear sisters, are a key to the success of this new, balanced, and coordinated gospel-teaching effort. Please teach those whom you love what you are learning from the scriptures. Teach them how to turn to the Savior for His healing and cleansing power when they sin. And teach them how to draw upon His strengthening power every day of their lives.

Third, establish a pattern of regular temple attendance. This may require a little more sacrifice in your life. More regular time in the temple will allow the Lord to teach you how to draw upon His priesthood power with which you have been endowed in His temple. For those of you who don't live near a temple, I invite you to study prayerfully about temples in the scriptures and in the words of living prophets. Seek to *know* more, to *understand* more, to *feel* more about temples than you ever have before.

In our worldwide youth devotional last June, I spoke about a young man whose life changed when his parents exchanged his smartphone for a flip phone. This young man's mother is a fearless woman of faith. She saw her son drifting toward choices that could prevent him from serving a mission. She took her pleadings to the temple to know how best to help her son. Then she followed through with every impression.

She said: "I felt the Spirit guiding me to check my son's phone at specific times to catch specific things. I don't know how to navigate these smartphones, but the Spirit guided me through all the social media that I don't even use! I know the Spirit helps parents who are seeking guidance to protect their children. [At first] my son was furious with me. ... But after only three days, he thanked me! He could feel the difference."

Her son's behavior and attitudes changed dramatically. He became more helpful at home, smiled more, and was more attentive at church. He loved serving for a time in a temple baptistry and preparing for his mission.

My fourth invitation, for you who are of age, is to participate fully in Relief Society. I urge you to study the current Relief Society purpose statement. It is inspiring. It may guide you in developing your own purpose statement for your own life. I also entreat you to savor the truths in the Relief Society declaration published almost 20 years ago.<sup>3</sup> A framed copy of this

declaration hangs on the wall in the office of the First Presidency. I am thrilled *every* time I read it. It describes who you are and who the Lord needs you to be at this *precise* time as you do *your* part to help gather scattered Israel.

My dear sisters, we need *you!* We “need *your* strength, *your* conversion, *your* conviction, *your* ability to lead, *your* wisdom, and *your* voices.”<sup>4</sup> We simply cannot gather Israel without you.

I love you and thank you and now bless you with the ability to leave the world behind as you assist in this crucial and urgent work. Together we can do all that our Heavenly Father needs us to do to prepare the world for the Second Coming of His Beloved Son.

Jesus is the Christ. This is His Church. Of this I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.