

From the Life of Gordon B. Hinckley

Throughout his life, Gordon B. Hinckley expressed appreciation for the abilities and contributions of women. He also expressed his strong witness of the importance of women in God's eternal plan. He delighted in women's increasing opportunities, as well as in their faith in the Savior and their devotion to their families and the Church.

Gordon B. Hinckley's mother, Ada, was bright and educated and had a love for literature, music, and art. At the age of 29, she married widower Bryant Hinckley and took on the responsibility of eight children who were mourning the death of their mother. She nurtured them with love, gave them the support they needed, and learned to manage a large household. Gordon was the first of five children born to Ada and Bryant. Although Ada died when Gordon was 20 years old, her teachings and example remained a force for good throughout his life. When he spoke of her, he always mentioned her tremendous influence on him.

Gordon B. Hinckley's wife, Marjorie Pay, also had a profound influence on him. She was a strong woman who was devoted to the gospel of Jesus Christ. She had extraordinary faith, a cheerful disposition, and a love of life. In a tender letter to her, President Hinckley expressed his love and respect:

"We have traveled far and wide together. We have visited every continent. We have held meetings in the great cities of the world and in many smaller ones. ... We have spoken to millions who have appreciated you so greatly. With your familiar words you have won the love of all who have heard you. Your down-to-earth good sense, your sparkling and refreshing wit, your quiet and unfailing wisdom, and your tremendous and ever constant faith have won the hearts of all who have listened to you. ... Your voracious appetite for reading and your relentless pursuit of knowledge have kept you alert and refreshing throughout a long and fruitful life." (In *Glimpses into the Life and Heart of Marjorie Pay Hinckley*, ed. Virginia H. Pearce (1999), 194–95)

President Hinckley often spoke about women's divine nature and urged them forward to greater achievement and faith. To young women, he declared: "You are literally a daughter of the Almighty. There is no limit to your potential. If you will take control of your lives, the future is filled with opportunity and gladness. You cannot afford to waste your talents or your time. Great opportunities lie ahead of you." (*"Let Virtue Garnish Thy Thoughts Unceasingly," Ensign or Liahona, May 2007, 115.*) Concerning adult women, he said: "The world needs the touch of women and their love, their comfort,

and their strength. Our harsh environment needs their encouraging voices, the beauty that seems to fall within their natures, the spirit of charity that is their inheritance." (*Discourses of President Gordon B. Hinckley, Volume 2: 2000–2004 (2005), 509–10.*)

At the general conference following the death of his beloved companion, Marjorie, President Hinckley concluded one of his addresses with this heartfelt expression of gratitude: "How thankful I am, how thankful we all must be, for the women in our lives. God bless them. May His great love distill upon them and crown them with luster and beauty, grace and faith." (*"The Women in Our Lives," Ensign or Liahona, Nov. 2004, 85.*)

Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley

1. Women have a high and sacred place in the eternal plan of God.

I remind you of words spoken by the Prophet Joseph to the women of the Relief Society in April of 1842. Said he: "If you live up to your privileges, the angels cannot be restrained from being your associates" [*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith (2007), 454*]. What marvelous potential lies within YOU. (*"Stand Strong against the Wiles of the World," Ensign, Nov. 1995, 98.*)

You are very precious, each of you. ... You occupy a high and sacred place in the eternal plan of God, our Father in Heaven. You are His daughters, precious to Him, loved by Him, and very important to Him. His grand design cannot succeed without you. (*"Daughters of God," Ensign, Nov. 1991, 97.*)

Let me say to you sisters that you do not hold a second place in our Father's plan for the eternal happiness and well-being of His children. You are an absolutely essential part of that plan. Without you the plan could not function. Without you the entire program would be frustrated. (*"Women of the Church," Ensign, Nov. 1996, 67.*)

There has come to you as your birthright something beautiful and sacred and divine. Never forget that. Your Eternal Father is the great Master of the universe. He rules over all, but He also will listen to your prayers as His daughter and hear you as you speak with Him. He will answer your prayers. He will not leave you alone. (*"Stay on the High Road," Ensign or Liahona, May 2004, 112.*)

2. The Lord's counsel to Emma Smith applies to all.

The twenty-fifth section of the Doctrine and Covenants ... is a revelation given through Joseph the Prophet to his wife Emma. ... Said he to Emma, and to each of us:

“A revelation I give unto you concerning my will; and if thou art faithful and walk in the paths of virtue before me, I will preserve thy life, and thou shalt receive an inheritance in Zion” [D&C 25:2; see also verse 16]. ...

In very large measure each of us holds the key to the blessings of the Almighty upon us. If we wish the blessing, we must pay the price. A part of that price lies in being faithful. Faithful to what? Faithful to ourselves, to the very best that is within us. No woman can afford to demean herself, to belittle herself, to downgrade her abilities or her capacities. Let each be faithful to the great, divine attributes that are within her. Be faithful to the gospel. Be faithful to the Church. We have all about us those who are seeking to undermine it, to look for weaknesses in its early leaders, to find fault with its programs, to speak critically of it. I give you my testimony that it is the work of God, and those who speak against it are speaking against him.

Be faithful to him. He is the one true source of your strength. He is your Father in Heaven. He lives. He hears and answers prayers. Be faithful to God.

The Lord continued, saying to Emma, “If thou ... walk in the paths of virtue.”

I think every woman ... understands the meaning of that. I feel those words were given to Emma Smith, and consequently to all of us, as a condition to be observed if we are to receive an inheritance in the kingdom of God. Lack of virtue is totally inconsistent with obedience to the commandments of God. There is nothing more beautiful than virtue. There is no strength that is greater than the strength of virtue. There is no other nobility equal to the nobility of virtue. There is no quality so becoming, no attire so attractive. ...

Emma was called “an elect lady” [D&C 25:3]. That is, to use another line of scripture, she was a “chosen vessel of the Lord.” (See *Moro. 7:31*.) Each of you is an elect lady. You have come out of the world as

partakers of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. You have made your election, and if you are living worthy of it, the Lord will honor you in it and magnify you. ...

Emma was to be ordained (*President Hinckley's use of ordained reflects the use of that word in Doctrine and Covenants 25:7, part of which he quotes in this sentence. In the English edition of the scriptures, the footnote to the word ordained in this verse says “or set apart.” In the early days of the Restoration, the terms ordained and set apart were often used interchangeably; ordained did not always refer to priesthood offices (see, for example, D&C 63:45).*) under the hand of Joseph “to expound scriptures, and to exhort the church, according as it shall be given thee by my Spirit” [D&C 25:7].

She was to be a teacher. She was to be a teacher of righteousness and truth. For the Lord said concerning this calling to her, “Thou shalt receive the Holy Ghost, and thy time shall be given to writing, and to learning much” [D&C 25:8].

She was to study the gospel. She also was to study the things of the world in which she lived. That was made clear in subsequent revelations applicable to all of us. She was to devote her time “to learning much.” She was to write, giving expression to her thoughts.

To you women of today, who are old or young, may I suggest that you write, that you keep journals, that you express your thoughts on paper. Writing is a great discipline. It is a tremendous educational effort. It will assist you in various ways, and you will bless the lives of many. ...

In the language of the revelation, [Emma] was to “expound scriptures, and to exhort the church, according as it shall be given thee by my Spirit.”

What a remarkable charge to her and to all of the women of this Church. There must be learning, there must be preparation, there must be organization of thought, there must be an expounding of the scriptures, there must be an exhortation to good works as directed by the Holy Spirit.

The Lord continued, “I say unto thee that thou shalt lay aside the things of this world, and seek for the things of a better” [D&C 25:10].

I feel he was not telling Emma that she should not feel concerned about a place to live, food on her table, and clothing. He was saying to her that she should not be obsessed with these things, as so many of us are wont to be. He was telling her to get her thoughts on the higher things of life, the things of righteousness and goodness, matters of charity and love for others, the things of eternity. ...

Continuing, the Lord said: "Wherefore, lift up thy heart and rejoice, and cleave unto the covenants which thou hast made" [D&C 25:13].

I believe he is saying to each of us, be happy. The gospel is a thing of joy. It provides us with a reason for gladness. Of course there are times of sorrow. Of course there are hours of concern and anxiety. We all worry. But the Lord has told us to lift our hearts and rejoice. ("*If Thou Art Faithful*," *Ensign*, Nov. 1984, 90–92.)

3. Mothers have a sacred calling to bring up their children in righteousness and truth.

The true strength of any nation, society, or family lies in those qualities of character that have been acquired for the most part by children taught in the quiet, simple everyday manner of mothers. (*Motherhood: A Heritage of Faith* (pamphlet, 1995), 6.)

It is the home which produces the nursery stock of new generations. I hope that you mothers will realize that when all is said and done, you have no more compelling responsibility, nor any laden with greater rewards, than the nurture you give your children in an environment of security, peace, companionship, love, and motivation to grow and do well. ("*Stand Strong against the Wives of the World*," 99.)

I remind mothers everywhere of the sanctity of your calling. No other can adequately take your place. No responsibility is greater, no obligation more binding than that you rear in love and peace and integrity those whom you have brought into the world. ("*Bring Up a Child in the Way He Should Go*," *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 60.)

Rear your children in light and truth. Teach them to pray while they are young. Read to them from the scriptures even though they may not understand all that you read. Teach them to pay their tithes and offerings on the first money they ever receive. Let this practice become a habit in their lives. Teach your sons to honor womanhood. Teach your daughters to walk in virtue. Accept responsibility in the Church, and trust in the Lord to make you equal

to any call you may receive. Your example will set a pattern for your children. ("*Stand Strong against the Wives of the World*," 99.)

God bless you, mothers! When all the victories and defeats of men's efforts are tallied, when the dust of life's battles begins to settle, when all for which we labor so hard in this world of conquest fades before our eyes, you will be there, you must be there, as the strength for a new generation, the ever-improving onward movement of the race. Its quality will depend on you. (*Motherhood: A Heritage of Faith*, 13.)

4. Women have great responsibilities in the work of salvation.

There is strength and great capacity in the women of this Church. There is leadership and direction, a certain spirit of independence, and yet great satisfaction in being a part of this, the Lord's kingdom, and of working hand in hand with [holders of] the priesthood to move it forward. ("*Women of the Church*," 68.)

God has given the women of this church a work to do in building his kingdom. That concerns all aspects of our great triad of responsibility—which is, first, to teach the gospel to the world; second, to strengthen the faith and build the happiness of the membership of the Church; and, third, to carry forward the great work of salvation for the dead. ("*Live Up to Your Inheritance*," *Ensign*, Nov. 1983, 84.)

Women in the Church are associates with their brethren in carrying forward this mighty work of the Lord. ... Women carry tremendous responsibilities and they are accountable for the fulfillment of those responsibilities. They head their own organizations, and those organizations are strong and viable and are significant forces for good in the world. They stand in an associate role to the priesthood, all striving together to build the kingdom of God in the earth. We honor and respect you for your capacity. We expect leadership, and strength, and impressive results from your management of the organizations for which you are responsible. We uphold and sustain you as daughters of God, working in a great partnership to assist him in bringing to pass the immortality and the eternal life of all of the sons and daughters of God. ("*If Thou Art Faithful*," 89.)

5. Relief Society is a source of immeasurable blessings.

The women of the Relief Society are literally encircled eternally in the arms of our Lord. In my judgment, this is the greatest women's organization in all the world. It is a God-given creation. Joseph Smith spoke and acted as a prophet when he organized the Relief Society in 1842. (*"In the Arms of His Love," Ensign or Liahona, Nov. 2006, 115.*)

It is so tremendously important that the women of the Church stand strong and immovable for that which is correct and proper under the plan of the Lord. I am convinced there is no other organization anywhere to match the Relief Society of this Church. ... If [its members] will be united and speak with one voice, their strength will be incalculable. (*"Standing Strong and Immovable," Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting, Jan. 10, 2004, 20.*)

I attended a stake conference where a young woman, president of the Relief Society of a singles ward, spoke of service and the great opportunity afforded the young women in her ward. You have all of this. You have your own organization. You have able leaders to counsel you. You have those who will reach out to you to help you in your times of trouble and distress. (*"The BYU Experience" (Brigham Young University devotional, Nov. 4, 1997), 2, speeches.byu.edu.*)

Who can gauge the miraculous effects upon the lives of millions of women whose knowledge has been increased, whose vision has been extended, whose lives have been broadened, and whose understanding of the things of God has been enriched by reason of countless lessons effectively taught and learned in meetings of the Relief Society?

Who can measure the joy that has come into the lives of these women as they have mingled together, socializing in the atmosphere of the ward or branch, enriching the lives of one another through companionships that have been sweet and treasured?

Who, even in the wildest stretch of imagination, can fathom the uncountable acts of charity that have been performed, the food that has been put on barren tables, the faith that has been nurtured in desperate hours of illness, the wounds that have been bound up, the pains that have been

ameliorated by loving hands and quiet and reassuring words, the comfort that has been extended in times of death and consequent loneliness? ...

No one could possibly calculate the projects that have been undertaken and completed by local Relief Societies. No one could possibly estimate the good that has come into the lives of the women belonging to these organizations and those whom they have benefited through their good works. ...

God bless the Relief Society of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. May the spirit of love which has motivated its members ... continue to grow and be felt over the world. May their works of charity touch for good the lives of uncounted numbers wherever they find expression. And may light and understanding, learning and knowledge, and eternal truth grace the lives of generations of women yet to come, throughout the nations of the earth, because of this singular and divinely established institution. (*"Ambitious to Do Good," Ensign, Mar. 1992, 4-6.*)

6. Rise to the stature of the divinity within you.

You are a vast concourse of women of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. ... No one can calculate the tremendous force for good that you can become. ... I charge you to stand tall and be strong in defense of those great virtues which have been the backbone of our social progress. When you are united, your power is limitless. You can accomplish anything you wish to accomplish. And oh, how very, very great is the need for you in a world of crumbling values where the adversary seems so very much to be in control. (*"Your Greatest Challenge, Mother," Ensign, Nov. 2000, 97.*)

I feel to invite women everywhere to rise to the great potential within you. I do not ask that you reach beyond your capacity. I hope you will not nag yourselves with thoughts of failure. I hope you will not try to set goals far beyond your capacity to achieve. I hope you will simply do what you can do in the best way you know. If you do so, you will witness miracles come to pass. (*Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley (1997), 696.*)

I express my gratitude to you faithful Latter-day Saint women, now numbered in the millions and found across the earth. Great is your power for good. Marvelous are your talents and devotion. Tremendous is your faith and your love for the Lord, for His work, and for His sons and daughters. Continue to live the gospel. Magnify it before all of your associates. Your good works will carry more weight than any words you might speak. Walk in virtue and truth, with faith and faithfulness. You are part of an eternal plan, a plan designed by God our Eternal Father. Each day is a part of that eternity.

I know that many of you carry terribly heavy burdens. May your associates in the Church, your brethren and sisters, help you with those burdens. May your prayers ascend to Him who is all powerful, who loves you, and who can bring to bear forces and factors which can help you. This is a work of miracles. You know it, and I know it. It is easy for me to tell you not to become discouraged, but I say it nonetheless, as I urge you to go forward in faith. (*“Daughters of God,” 100.*)

Marvelous is the power of women of faith. It has been demonstrated again and again in the history of this church. It goes on among us today. I think it is part of the divinity within you.

Sisters, rise to the stature of that divinity. In that effort make the world in which you live a better place for yourself and for all who will come after you. (*“Rise to the Stature of the Divine within You,” Ensign, Nov. 1989, 97–98.*)

God be thanked for the wonderful women of this Church. May he plant in your hearts a sense of pride in your capacities and a conviction of truth which shall be as a rudder to keep you safe through every storm. (*“Live Up to Your Inheritance,” 84.*)

Questions

- What do we learn from President Hinckley about how Heavenly Father feels about His daughters? (See section 1.) Why is it important for us to understand the “high and sacred place” of women in God’s eternal plan?

- What aspects of the Lord’s counsel to Emma Smith are especially helpful to you? (See section 2.) What can we learn from section 2 about being faithful? What can we learn about being an “elect lady”? What can we learn about how to apply the scriptures to ourselves?
- What are your impressions as you read President Hinckley’s counsel to mothers? (See section 3.) How have you been blessed by a mother’s influence? For parents, why is “no obligation more binding” than rearing their children “in love and peace and integrity”?
- What examples have you seen of the “strength and great capacity” of women in the Church? (See section 4.) What are some ways that women can help bring to pass “the immortality and the eternal life of all of the sons and daughters of God”? Why is it important that men and women work together to move the Lord’s work forward? What are some examples you have seen of this?
- Review the blessings that come from Relief Society, as President Hinckley outlines in section 5. What blessings have come to you from the efforts of Relief Society sisters, including those who are serving in Young Women and Primary? How can you strengthen the Relief Society in your ward? How can Relief Society help women increase their influence for good?
- Consider President Hinckley’s encouragement to “rise to the great potential within you” (section 6). How can we gain a better vision of what God sees our potential to be? How can we progress toward reaching our potential? When have you seen the “marvelous ... power of women of faith”?

Related Scriptures

Proverbs 31:10–31; Luke 10:38–42; Acts 9:36–40; Romans 16:1–2; 2 Timothy 1:1–5; Alma 56:41–48