

“Be Thou an Example”

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Fill your mind with truth; fill your heart with love; fill your life with service.

Tonight we have been inspired by the stirring messages of the general presidency of the Relief Society of the Church. Their plea that all of us be steadfast and immovable is wise counsel, that we might meet the turbulence of our times and indeed be citadels of constancy midst a sea of change.

Let us review words of wisdom written by the Apostle Paul to his beloved Timothy:

“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

“Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron.”¹

Then came Paul’s rallying call to Timothy—equally applicable to each one of us: “Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”²

With you dear sisters assembled here in the Conference Center and in congregations throughout the world, I share a three-part formula to serve as an unfailing guide to meet this challenge issued by the Apostle Paul:

- 1. Fill your mind with truth;**
- 2. Fill your heart with love;**
- 3. Fill your life with service.**

First, *fill your mind with truth*. We do not find truth groveling through error. Truth is found by searching, studying, and living the revealed word of God. We adopt error when we mingle with error. We learn truth when we associate with truth.

The Savior of the world instructed, “Seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith.”³ He added, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.”⁴

He invites each of us, “Learn of me, and listen to my words; walk in the meekness of my Spirit, and you shall have peace in me.”⁵

One from pioneer times who exemplified the charge heard this evening to be steadfast and immovable and who

filled her mind, heart, and soul with truth was Catherine Curtis Spencer. Her husband, Orson Spencer, was a sensitive, well-educated man. She had been reared in Boston and was cultured and refined. She had six children. Her delicate health declined from exposure and from the hardships encountered after leaving Nauvoo. Elder Spencer wrote to her parents and asked if she could return to live with them while he established a home for her in the West. Their reply: “Let her renounce her degrading faith, and she can come back—but never until she does.”

Sister Spencer would not renounce her faith. When her parents’ letter was read to her, she asked her husband to get his Bible and read to her from the book of Ruth as follows: “Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.”⁶

Outside the storm raged, the wagon covers leaked, and friends held milk pans over Sister Spencer’s head to keep her dry. In these conditions and without a word of complaint, she closed her eyes for the last time.

Though we may not necessarily be called upon to forfeit our lives, let us remember that He hears our silent prayers. He who observes our unheralded acts will reward us openly when the need comes.

We live in turbulent times. Often the future is unknown; therefore, it behooves us to prepare for uncertainties. Statistics reveal that at some time, because of the illness or death of your husband or because of economic necessity, you may find yourself in the role of financial provider. I urge you to pursue your education and learn marketable skills so that, should an emergency arise, you are prepared to provide.

Your talents will expand as you study and learn. You will be able to better assist your children in their learning, and you will have peace of mind in knowing that you have prepared yourself for the eventualities that you may encounter in life.

To illustrate the second part of our formula—namely, *fill your heart with love*—I turn to a beautiful account recorded in the book of Acts which tells of a disciple named Tabitha, or Dorcas, who lived at Joppa. She was described as being a woman “full of good works and almsdeeds.”

“It came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber.

“And forasmuch as ... the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them.

“Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which [Tabitha] made, while she was with them.

“But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.

“And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive.

“And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord.”⁷

To me the scriptural reference to Tabitha, which describes her as a woman “full of good works and almsdeeds,” defines some of the fundamental responsibilities of Relief Society; namely, the relief of suffering, the caring for the poor, and all which that implies. Women of Relief Society, you truly are angels of mercy. This is demonstrated on a grand scale through the humanitarian outreach to the cold, the hungry, and to suffering wherever it is found. Your labors are also very much in evidence in our wards and in our stakes and missions. Every bishop in the Church could testify of this truth.

I remember when, as a young deacon, I would cover a portion of the ward on fast Sunday morning, giving the small envelope to each family, waiting while a contribution was placed in the envelope and then returning it to the bishop. On one such occasion, an elderly member, Brother Wright, who lived alone, welcomed me at the door and, with aged hands, fumbled at the tie of the envelope and placed within it a small sum. His eyes fairly glistened as he made his contribution. He invited me to sit down and then told me of a time many years before when his cupboard had been empty of food. In his hunger, he had prayed to Heavenly Father for food to eat. Not long thereafter, he gazed out his front window and beheld someone approaching his door, pulling behind her a red-colored wagon. It was Sister Balmforth, the Relief Society president, who had pulled that wagon almost half a mile over the railroad tracks and to his door. The wagon overflowed with food collected from the sisters of the ward Relief Society, with which Sister Balmforth filled the empty shelves in Brother Wright’s kitchen. He described her to me as “an angel sent from heaven.”

Sisters, you are the epitome of love. You brighten your homes, you lead with kindness your children; and while your husbands may be head of the home, you surely are the heart of the home. Together, through respect for each other and sharing of responsibilities, you make an unbeatable team.

To me it is significant that when children need care and loving attention, they turn to you—their mothers. Even the wayward son or neglectful daughter, when he or she recognizes the need to return to the embrace of family, almost inevitably comes to Mother, who has never given up on her child.

Mother’s love brings out the best in a child. You become the model for your children to follow.

The first word a child learns and utters is usually the dear expression “Mama.” To me it is significant that on the battlefields of war or in peace, frequently when death is about to overtake a son, his final word is usually “Mother.” Sisters, what a noble role is yours. I testify that your hearts are filled with love.

To the third part of our formula—namely, *fill your life with service*—I mention two separate examples. One features a teacher and the profound influence she has had in the lives of those whom she taught, while the other pertains to a missionary couple whose service helped to bring the light of the gospel to those who had lived in spiritual darkness.

Many years ago there was a young woman, Baur Dee Sheffield, who taught in Mutual. She had no children of her own, though she and her husband dearly longed for children. Her love was expressed through devotion to her special young women as each week she taught them eternal truths and lessons of life. Then came illness, followed by death. She was but 27.

Each year, on Memorial Day, her Mutual girls made a pilgrimage of prayer to the graveside of their teacher, always leaving flowers and a little card signed “To Baur Dee, from your girls.” First there were 10 girls who went, then five, then two, and eventually just one, who continues to visit each Memorial Day, always placing on the

grave a bouquet of flowers and a card, inscribed as always, “To Baur Dee, from your girls.”

One year, nearly 25 years after Baur Dee’s death, the only one of “her girls” who continued to visit the grave realized she would be away on Memorial Day and decided to visit her teacher’s grave a few days early. She had gathered flowers, tied them with a ribbon, attached a card, and was putting on her jacket to leave when her doorbell rang. She opened the door and was greeted by one of her visiting teachers, Colleen Fuller, who said she had experienced difficulty getting together with her visiting teaching partner and so had decided to come alone and unannounced in an effort to complete her visiting teaching before the end of the month. As Colleen was invited in, she noticed the jacket and flowers and apologized for obviously interrupting whatever had been planned.

“Oh, no problem,” came the response. “I’m just on my way to the cemetery to put flowers on the grave of the woman who was my Mutual teacher, who had a profound influence on me and the other girls she taught. Originally about 10 of us visited her grave each year to express our love and thanks to her, but now I represent the group.”

Colleen asked, “Could your teacher’s name have been Baur Dee?”

“Why, yes,” came the answer. “How did you know?”

With a catch in her voice, Colleen said, “Baur Dee was my aunt—my mother’s sister. Every Memorial Day since she died, my family has found on her grave a bouquet of flowers and a card inscribed from Baur Dee’s girls. They’ve always wanted to know who these girls were so they could thank them for remembering Baur Dee. Now I can let them know.”

Said American author Thornton Wilder, “The highest tribute to the dead is not grief but gratitude.”

The second example of lives filled with service, with which I shall conclude, is the missionary experience of Juliusz and Dorothy Fussek, who were called to fill an 18-month mission in Poland. Brother Fussek was born in Poland. He spoke the language. He loved the people. Sister Fussek was born in England and knew little of Poland and nothing of its people.

Trusting in the Lord, they embarked on their assignment. The living conditions were primitive, the work lonely, their task immense. A mission had not at that time been fully established in Poland. The assignment given the Fussesks was to prepare the way so that the mission could be expanded and gain permanence, that other missionaries be called to serve, people taught, converts baptized, branches established, and chapels erected.

Did Elder and Sister Fussek despair because of the enormity of their assignment? Not for a moment. They knew their calling was from God, they prayed for His divine help, and they devoted themselves wholeheartedly to their work. They remained in Poland not 18 months, but rather served for five years. All of the foregoing objectives were realized. Such came about following an earlier meeting where Elders Russell M. Nelson, Hans B. Ringger, and I, accompanied by Elder Fussek, met with Minister Adam Wopatka of the Polish government, and we heard him say, “Your church is welcome here. You may build your buildings, you may send your missionaries. You are welcome in Poland. This man,” pointing to Juliusz Fussek, “has served your church well, as has his wife. You can be grateful for their example and their work.”

Like the Fussesks, let us do what we should do in the work of the Lord. Then we can, with Juliusz and Dorothy

Fussek, echo the Psalm: “My help cometh from the Lord.”⁸

Dear sisters, you indeed are “examples of the believers.” May our Heavenly Father bless each of you, married or single, in your homes, in your families, in your very lives—that you may merit the glorious salutation of the Savior of the world: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”⁹ For this I pray, as I bless you, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. 1 Tim. 4:1–2.

2. 1 Tim. 4:12.

3. D&C 88:118.

4. John 5:39.

5. D&C 19:23.

6. Ruth 1:16.

7. Acts 9:36–42.

8. Ps. 121:2.

9. Matt. 25:21.