

# Belonging Is Our Sacred Birthright

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I testify that you do fit, that you do belong to Relief Society—the Good Shepherd’s fold for women.

Sisters, I rejoice that we’re together tonight. Thanks for your countless acts of compassion, your ever-expanding testimonies, your endless supply of casseroles! You make a difference and are sunshine for the soul!

In these perilous times, I find comfort in the promise that “if [we] are prepared [we] shall not fear.”<sup>1</sup> Relief Society helps us be prepared—not just temporally, but spiritually. But Relief Society cannot help in our preparation without our participation! I worry that some of you feel you don’t fit in Relief Society, that you don’t belong! Whether you feel too young or too old, too rich or too poor, too intelligent or too undereducated, none of us is too different to belong! If I could have my heart’s desire, it would be that every one of you feel like you fit, like you belong. I testify that you *do* fit, that you *do* belong to Relief Society—the Good Shepherd’s fold for women.

I empathize with President Joseph F. Smith when he said back in 1907, “Today it is too much the case that our young, vigorous, intelligent women feel that only the aged should be connected with the Relief Society.” Then he declared, “*This is a mistake.*”<sup>2</sup>

I recently visited Ethiopia, where I met Jennifer Smith. If ever a woman could say she didn’t fit, it was Sister Smith. She said: “I was so unlike any other [sister] in our branch. Language, clothing, culture, all seemed to be [a] gap [between us. But] when we spoke of the Savior ... the gap narrowed. When we spoke of a loving Heavenly Father ... , there was no gap.” She continued, “We cannot change nor take away the burdens of others, but we can include and belong to each other in love.”<sup>3</sup>

These sisters found a piece of Zion by becoming “of one heart and one mind.”<sup>4</sup> For “if ye are not one,” says the Lord, “ye are not mine.”<sup>5</sup> President Hinckley has said that if we “will be united and speak with one voice, [our] strength will be incalculable.”<sup>6</sup> As sisters in Zion, how do we become one? The same way we belong to a spouse or to a family: we share who we are—our feelings, our thoughts, our hearts.

In one ward, mothers introduce their daughters to Relief Society in a Sunday meeting when they turn 18. One mother tenderly expressed how her Relief Society sisters had nurtured her from her early marriage: “They have brought meals and hugs in time of sorrow, laughter, and support for celebration. They have taught me the gospel by visiting me and letting me visit them. They have allowed me to make mistakes on their time.” This mother then explained to her daughter how the daisies in their garden came from Carolyn, the lilies from Venice, the buttercups from Pauline. The daughter was amazed. Her mother replied, “These women are my sisters in every

way, and I am grateful to bring you into their care.”

It’s the variety in a garden that contributes to its beauty—we need daisies and lilies and buttercups; we need gardeners who water, nurture, and care. Unfortunately, Satan knows that sharing unites our sisterhood through the everyday and the eternities. He knows that selfishness will begin to destroy sharing, which destroys unity, which destroys Zion. Sisters, we cannot let the adversary divide us. You see, “A perfect oneness,” said Brigham Young, “will save a people.”<sup>7</sup> And I would add that a perfect oneness will save our society.

We are reminded by President Boyd K. Packer that “too many sisters ... think that Relief Society is merely a class to attend. ... Sisters,” he counseled, “you must graduate from *thinking* that you only *attend* Relief Society to *feeling* that you *belong* to it!”<sup>8</sup> Our sense of belonging begins on Sunday as we hear each other’s voices. No teacher should give *her* lesson to a group of silent sisters, because the lesson is *our* lesson.

Belonging is being needed, loved, and missed when you’re away; belonging is needing, loving, and missing those who are away. That is the difference between *attending* and *belonging*. Relief Society is not just a Sunday class: it is a divine gift to us as women.

Here are two reasons why *I* feel I belong to Relief Society—and it’s not just because of my current calling! I was feeling down last month when my visiting teachers came. Sue is divorced, and Cate is one of my former Laurels. They brought the message and a prayer. But they also brought real concern. I felt lifted and loved.

One of my sisters in Relief Society offered a prayer not long ago and asked Heavenly Father to bless me—by name—in my responsibilities. She didn’t know my specific needs, but she knew my heart.

Now, maybe your visiting teachers haven’t come recently, or maybe you haven’t been prayed for by name. I’m sorry if that’s been so. But you don’t have to be visit taught to be a good visiting teacher; you don’t have to be prayed for to pray. In spite of our differences, if we will share generously and honestly, our sisters will also share; we will know one another’s hearts, and belonging will flower like a garden. Sister Smith and our Ethiopian sisters learned that differences don’t matter, for belonging is charity, the pure love of Christ, in action. And charity never faileth.

Whether we serve in Primary or Young Women, whether we’re active or less so, whether we’re married or single, whether we’re spring chickens or fall hens, we all belong to Relief Society. I’m a fall hen, but I *feel* like a spring chicken! We need your voices, your feelings, your hearts. Relief Society needs you. And you know what? *You* need Relief Society. When you don’t participate, you’re depriving yourself *and* you’re depriving Relief Society.

Sisters, we can have no divisions in Relief Society; all “members should have the same care one for another.”<sup>9</sup> “And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.”<sup>10</sup> For “the body hath need of *every* member, that *all* may be edified *together*, that the system may be kept perfect.”<sup>11</sup>

Yes, Relief Society can be more fun, more joyful, more unifying. Our burdens can be lightened, our loads lessened. Relief Society’s not perfect, because not one of us is. But we can work on it; we can perfect it together as we take our own steps forward. How? By just changing our attitudes: How we talk about Relief Society affects how others feel about Relief Society—especially young women.

Be supportive of our Relief Society presidencies and teachers—let them learn on our time (just as we will learn

on theirs). Forgive more and judge less. Be a caring, consistent visiting teacher. Attend home, family, and personal enrichment meeting with enthusiasm. Look for what's *good* about Relief Society and build on it.

President Joseph F. Smith issued a charge that we “take hold of this work [of Relief Society] with vigor, with intelligence and unitedly, for the building up of Zion.”<sup>12</sup> If we believe that the Lord's Church has been restored—and we do—then we must believe that Relief Society is an essential part of His organizational fold. We need to stop asking *whether* we fit—because we do! Our differences are not so great that we cannot build Zion together.

Nearly a year ago, in Pasadena, California, Sister Janice Burgoyne was dying of cancer. She had shared generously of herself and was dearly loved. Her Relief Society sisters were bringing her meals, cleaning her house, caring for her two young sons, helping her husband plan a funeral. It was hard for Janice to receive so much help, knowing that her sisters would find that piece of old toast behind the couch. She worried her sisters would know more than her heart. But *because* her sisters knew her heart, it didn't matter. They provided car pools, tutored homework, played her piano, changed bedding. And they did it day after day after day, without complaint, with boundless charity. Such sharing forever changed those sisters. Before she died, Janice turned to a Relief Society sister and asked with gratitude and awe, “How does anyone die without Relief Society?”

To you, my dear sisters—and you are *my* sisters—I ask, “How does anyone *live* without Relief Society?”

Belonging is our sacred birthright. How I'd like to bundle you in my arms and go to Relief Society with you. How I would like to know your hearts and have you know mine. Bring your hearts, your charitable hearts, to Relief Society. Bring your talents, your gifts, your individuality so that we can be one.

I testify that “the good shepherd doth call after [us] ... [to] bring [us] into his fold.”<sup>13</sup> We may not have all the answers, but we must trust that Relief Society is an essential part of His work, for

*Though [our] path may wind across the mountains,  
He knows the meadows where [we] feed. ...  
He clothes the lilies of the field,  
He feeds the lambs [of] His fold,  
And He will heal those who trust Him,  
And make [our] hearts as gold.*<sup>14</sup>

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. D&C 38:30.

2. In Conference Report, Apr. 1907, 6; emphasis added.

3. Personal correspondence.

4. Moses 7:18.

5. D&C 38:27.

6. “Standing Strong and Immovable,” *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, 10 Jan. 2004, 20.

7. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (1997), 354.

8. “The Relief Society,” *Ensign*, May 1998, 73.

9. 1 Cor. 12:25.

10. 1 Cor. 12:26.

11. D&C 84:110; emphasis added.

12. In Conference Report, Apr. 1907, 6.

13. Alma 5:60.

14. Roger Hoffman, “Consider the Lilies.”