

# If Ye Are Prepared Ye Shall Not Fear

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We do live in turbulent times. Often the future is unknown; therefore, it behooves us to prepare for uncertainties.

It is a privilege to stand before you at this general Relief Society conference. I recognize that beyond you who are gathered in this Conference Center, there are many thousands watching and listening to the proceedings by way of satellite transmission.

As I speak to you tonight, I realize that as a man I am in the minority and must be cautious in my comments. I feel much the same as the shy country cousin who came to visit his relative in a large cosmopolitan city. He had not sought his kinsman for some years and was startled when a young boy answered the ringing of the doorbell. The lad asked him in; and after they were comfortably seated, he inquired, “Who are you, anyway?”

The visitor answered, “I’m a cousin on your father’s side,” whereupon the boy replied, “Mister, in this house, that puts you on the wrong side!”

I trust that tonight, in this house, I might be found on the right side, even the Lord’s side.

Years ago I saw a photograph of a Sunday School class in the Sixth Ward of the Pioneer Stake in Salt Lake City. The photograph was taken in 1905. A sweet girl, her hair in pigtails, was shown on the front row. Her name was Belle Smith. Later, as Belle Smith Spafford, general president of the Relief Society, she wrote: “Never have women had greater influence than in today’s world. Never have the doors of opportunity opened wider for them. This is an inviting, exciting, challenging, and demanding period of time for women. It is a time rich in rewards if we keep our balance, learn the true values of life, and wisely determine priorities.”<sup>1</sup>

The Relief Society organization has had a goal to help eliminate illiteracy. Those of us who can read and write do not appreciate the deprivation of those who cannot read, who cannot write. They are shrouded by a dark cloud which stifles their progress, dulls their intellect, and dims their hopes. Sisters of the Relief Society, you can lift this cloud of despair and welcome heaven’s divine light as it shines upon your sisters.

Some years ago I was in Monroe, Louisiana, attending a regional conference. It was a beautiful occasion. At the airport on my way home, I was approached by a lovely African-American woman—a member of the Church—who said, smiling broadly, “President Monson, before I joined the Church and became a member of Relief Society, I could not read nor write. None of my family could. You see, we were all poor sharecroppers. President, my white Relief Society sisters—they taught me to read. They taught me to write. Now I help teach my white sisters how to read and how to write.” I reflected on the supreme joy she must have felt when she opened her Bible and read for the first time the words of the Lord:

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”<sup>2</sup>

That day in Monroe, Louisiana, I received a confirmation by the Spirit of the exalted objective of the Relief Society to help eliminate illiteracy.

The poet wrote:

*You may have tangible wealth untold;  
Caskets of jewels and coffers of gold.  
Richer than I you can never be—  
I had a Mother who read to me.*<sup>3</sup>

Another added this poignant verse:

*But think of the fate of a different child,  
Whose manner is meek, whose temper is mild,  
While yet instilled with that same special need,  
Was born to a mother who could not read.*<sup>4</sup>

Parents everywhere have a concern for their children and for their eternal happiness. This is depicted in the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, one of the longest running musicals in the history of the stage.

One laughs as he observes the old-fashioned father of a Jewish family in Russia as he attempts to cope with the changing times brought forcibly home to him by his beautiful teenage daughters.

The gaiety of the dance, the rhythm of the music, the excellence of the acting all fade in their significance when old Tevye speaks what to me becomes the message of the musical. He gathers his lovely daughters to his side and, in the simplicity of his peasant surroundings, counsels them as they ponder their future. Remember, cautions Tevye, “in Anatevka ... everyone knows who he is and what God expects him to do.”<sup>5</sup>

You, my beloved sisters, know who you are and what God expects you to become. Your challenge is to bring all for whom you are responsible to a knowledge of this truth. The Relief Society of this, the Lord’s Church, can be the means to achieve such a goal.

“The first and foremost opportunity for teaching in the Church lies in the home,” observed President David O. McKay.<sup>6</sup> “A true Mormon home is one in which if Christ should chance to enter, he would be pleased to linger and to rest.”<sup>7</sup>

What are we doing to ensure that our homes meet this description? It isn’t enough for parents alone to have strong testimonies. Children can ride only so long on the coattails of a parent’s conviction.

President Heber J. Grant declared: “It is our duty to teach our children in their youth. ... I may know that the gospel is true, and so may my wife; but I want to tell you that our children will not know that the gospel is true, unless they study it and gain a testimony for themselves.”<sup>8</sup>

A love for the Savior, a reverence for His name, and genuine respect one for another will provide a fertile seedbed for a testimony to grow.

Learning the gospel, bearing a testimony, leading a family are rarely if ever simple processes. Life's journey is characterized by bumps in the road, swells in the sea—even the turbulence of our times.

Some years ago, while visiting the members and missionaries in Australia, I witnessed a sublime example depicting how a treasury of testimony can bless and sanctify a home. The mission president, Horace D. Ensign, and I were traveling by plane the long distance from Sydney to Darwin, where I was to break ground for our first chapel in that city. En route we had a scheduled fueling stop at a remote mining community named Mt. Isa. As we entered the small airport, a woman and her two young children approached. She said, "I am Judith Louden, a member of the Church, and these are my children. We thought you might be on this flight, so we have come to visit with you during your brief stopover." She explained that her husband was not a member of the Church and that she and the children were indeed the only members in the entire area. We shared experiences and bore testimony.

Time passed. As we prepared to reboard, Sister Louden looked so forlorn, so alone. She pleaded, "You can't go yet; I have so missed the Church." Suddenly, over the loudspeaker there was announced a 30-minute mechanical delay of our flight. Sister Louden whispered, "My prayer has been answered." She then asked how she might influence her husband to show an interest in the gospel. We counseled her to include him in their home Primary lesson each week and be to him a living testimony of the gospel. I mentioned we would send to her a subscription to the *Children's Friend* and additional helps for her family teaching. We urged that she never give up on her husband.

We departed Mt. Isa, a city to which I have never returned. I shall, however, always hold dear in memory that sweet mother and those precious children extending a tear-filled expression and a fond wave of gratitude and good-bye.

Several years later, while speaking at a priesthood leadership meeting in Brisbane, Australia, I emphasized the significance of gospel scholarship in the home and the importance of living the gospel and being examples of the truth. I shared with the men assembled the account of Sister Louden and the impact her faith and determination had had on me. As I concluded, I said, "I suppose I'll never know if Sister Louden's husband ever joined the Church, but he couldn't have found a better model to follow than his wife."

One of the leaders raised his hand, then stood and declared, "Brother Monson, I am Richard Louden. The woman of whom you speak is my wife. The children [his voice quavered] are our children. We are a forever family now, thanks in part to the persistence and the patience of my dear wife. She did it all." Not a word was spoken. The silence was broken only by sniffles and marked by the sight of tears.

We do live in turbulent times. Often the future is unknown; therefore, it behooves us to prepare for uncertainties. Statistics reveal that at some time, for a variety of reasons, you may find yourself in the role of financial provider. I urge you to pursue your education and learn marketable skills so that, should such a situation arise, you are prepared to provide.

The role of women is unique. The renowned American essayist, novelist, and historian, Washington Irving, stated: "There is one in the world who feels for him who is sad a keener pang than he feels for himself; there is one

to whom reflected joy is better than that which comes direct; there is one who rejoices in another's honor more than in any which is one's own; there is one on whom transcendent excellence sheds no beam but that of delight; there is one who hides another's infirmities more faithfully than one's own; there is one who loses all sense of self in the sentiment of kindness, tenderness, and devotion to another. That one is woman."

Said President Gordon B. Hinckley: "God planted within women something divine that expresses itself in quiet strength, in refinement, in peace, in goodness, in virtue, in truth, in love. And all of these remarkable qualities find their truest and most satisfying expression in motherhood."<sup>9</sup>

Being a mother has never been an easy role. Some of the oldest writings in the world admonish us not to forsake the law of our mother, instruct us that a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother, and warn us not to ignore our mother when she is old.<sup>10</sup>

The scriptures also remind us that what we learn from our mothers comprises our very core values, as with the 2,000 stripling sons and warriors of Helaman, who "had been taught by their mothers, that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them."<sup>11</sup> And He did!

Many members of Relief Society do not have husbands. Death, divorce, or lack of opportunity to marry have, in many instances, made it necessary for a woman to stand alone. Additionally, there are those who have just come from the Young Women program. In reality, no one need stand alone, for a loving Heavenly Father will be by her side to give direction to her life and provide peace and assurance in those quiet moments where loneliness is found and where compassion is needed. Also significant is the fact that the women of Relief Society stand side by side as sisters. May you ever be there to care for each other, to recognize one another's needs. May you be sensitive to the circumstances of each, realizing that some women are facing particular challenges, but that every woman is a valued daughter of our Heavenly Father.

As I conclude my remarks, may I share with you an experience of several years ago which depicted the strength of you dear sisters in Relief Society.

During 1980, the sesquicentennial year of the organization of the Church, each member of the Relief Society general board was asked to write a personal letter to the sisters of the Church in the year 2030—50 years hence. The following is an excerpt from the letter written by Sister Helen Lee Goates:

"Our world of 1980 is filled with uncertainty, but I am determined to live each day with faith and not fear, to trust the Lord and to follow the counsel of our prophet today. I know that God lives, and I love Him with all my soul. I am so grateful that the gospel was restored to the earth 150 years ago and that I can enjoy the blessings of membership in this great Church. I am grateful for the priesthood of God, having felt its power throughout my life.

"I am at peace in my world and pray that you may be sustained in yours by firm testimonies and unwavering convictions of the gospel of Jesus Christ."<sup>12</sup>

Helen Lee Goates passed away in April of the year 2000. Shortly before her impending death from cancer, Sister Monson and I visited with her and her husband and family. She appeared calm and at peace. She told us she was prepared to go and looked forward to seeing once again her parents and other loved ones who had preceded her. In her life Sister Goates exemplified the nobility of Latter-day Saint women. In her passing she personified your

theme: “If ye are prepared ye shall not fear.”<sup>13</sup>

I bear to you, my beloved sisters, my witness that Heavenly Father lives, that Jesus is the Christ, and that we are led today by a prophet for our time—even President Gordon B. Hinckley. Safe journey to you as you travel along life’s pathway, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. *A Woman’s Reach* (1974), 21.

2. Matt. 11:28–30.

3. Strickland Gillilan, “The Reading Mother,” in *The Best Loved Poems of the American People*, sel. Hazel Felleman (1936), 376.

4. Added in April 1992 by Elizabeth Ware Pierce.

5. In *Great Musicals of the American Theatre*, 2 vols., ed. Stanley Richards (1973–76), 1:393.

6. *Priesthood Home Teaching Handbook*, rev. ed. (1967), ii.

7. *Gospel Ideals* (1953), 169.

8. *Gospel Standards*, comp. G. Homer Durham (1941), 155.

9. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (1997), 387.

10. See Prov. 1:8; Prov. 10:1; Prov. 23:22.

11. Alma 56:47.

12. Letter in possession of Relief Society office.

13. D&C 38:30.

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