

Sweet Moments

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If we are seeking the Lord and His guidance, if our direction is to return to our Father in Heaven, the sweet moments will come.

How thankful we are for our living prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley, and for his words “God bless the Relief Society of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”¹ Every sister in this Church belongs to Relief Society. Every one of us can feel the love that is so plentiful in this divinely instituted organization.

My heart is tender for you sisters who have been seriously impacted by recent natural disasters. I rejoice at the accounts of righteous women serving and being served. Through service, both the servant and the served experience the love of the Lord. At this time of trial, I pray that you will feel His love and also my love and the love of your many Relief Society sisters.

The Prophet Joseph Smith set the course for Relief Society when he said to the sisters in 1842: “It is natural for females to have feelings of charity—you are now placed in a situation where you can act according to those sympathies which God has planted in your bosoms. If you live up to these principles how great and glorious!”²

The sisters of the early Relief Society were stirred to action by the Prophet Joseph. Today, we too have opportunities to serve as “instruments in the hands of God to bring about this great work.”³

What does it mean to be an instrument in everyday terms? I think it means to nurture others. Joseph Smith called it acting “according to those sympathies” in our hearts. I have had many sweet moments when I have felt the Lord using me as an instrument. I believe that you too have been guided and helped as you teach, comfort, and encourage.

Yet as women we are pretty hard on ourselves! Believe me when I say each of us is much better than we think. We need to recognize and celebrate what we’re doing right. Much of what we do seems small and insignificant—just a part of daily living. When we are called “to give an account to Jehovah,”⁴ as the Prophet Joseph counseled, I know that we will have much to share.

Let me give you an example. Recently I asked Elder William W. Parmley about his memories of his mother, LaVern Parmley, who served as the Primary general president for 23 years. He didn’t refer to her talks at conferences or the many programs she implemented. He spoke of one of his sweetest moments when he was 17 and preparing to go away to college. He remembered sitting with his mother as she taught him how to sew on a button. With children of all ages, small and simple acts have lasting impact.

Not all of us have children to teach the basics of sewing to. The early sisters were a diverse group just like us.

Some were married, some single, some widowed, but they were united in purpose. As I've been with you in many lands and many places, I have felt your love. Sisters, I love you, and I know the Lord loves you too.

Now, many of you are single. You are students; you are working; you are new to Relief Society. Some of you have been longtime members. Please believe me when I say each of you is valued and needed. Each of you brings love, energy, perspective, and testimony to the work. Your efforts to live close to the Spirit bless us all because you have learned to rely on the Spirit for strength and direction.

One evening a single sister, Cynthia, felt prompted to go and see a sister she visit taught. The sister wasn't home. As Cynthia walked home, she noticed a nurse outside a hospital with two children, both serious-burn victims. When Cynthia heard the nurse call the little girl's name, a flash of recognition crossed her mind: she had known these two children as a missionary in Bolivia four years before. Becoming reacquainted on the lawn of the hospital, it was obvious the children were healing physically, but without any family support, they were suffering emotionally. Cynthia began visiting the children and nurturing them. Heeding the prompting of the Spirit, Cynthia became God's instrument for blessing two homesick children.

Was that effort because she was single? No. It was because she was attentive to the Spirit and had yielded her heart to God. If we are in tune with the Spirit, if we are seeking the Lord and His guidance, if our direction is to return to our Father in Heaven, the sweet moments will come. And we will treasure them, for we have become instruments in the hands of God.

Sometimes our lives take unexpected turns, and we have to move from "plan A" to "plan B." One single sister wrote: "I don't think I ever felt true happiness in my adult life until I came to the conclusion that my worth as a person and as a daughter of my Heavenly Father had nothing to do with my marital status. At that point, I began to focus on my spiritual and personal growth and not on whether I was ever going to marry."⁵

See how much we learn and grow when we share with one another our witness that the Lord lives and loves us. As I've said before, if I could have one thing happen for each of you, it would be that you feel the love of the Lord in your life daily.

Sometimes that love comes in unexpected ways. Kristen was finishing a graduate degree and had recently given birth to her second child. She felt the other graduates had accomplished so much more and was reluctant to attend the graduation dinner. Her fears were confirmed when, at the dinner, the students were asked to list their professional accomplishments. Kristen recalled: "I suddenly felt embarrassed and ashamed. I had nothing to call myself, no lofty position, no impressive job title." To make matters worse, the professor read the lists as he presented a diploma to each student. The woman ahead of Kristen had many accomplishments: she already had a PhD, was receiving a second master's degree, and she'd even been a mayor! The woman received grand applause.

Then it was Kristen's turn. She handed the professor her blank sheet, trying to hold back the tears. The professor had been one of her teachers and had praised her performance. He looked at her blank paper. Without missing a beat he announced, "Kristen holds the most critical role in all of society." He was quiet for a few seconds, then declared in a powerful voice, "She is the mother of her children." Instead of a few courteous claps, people rose to their feet. There was just one standing ovation that night; it was for the mother in the room.

Mothers, you are instruments in God's hands, with a divine responsibility to teach and nurture your children.

Little ones so need your kind and loving hand. As you put them first, He will direct you how to best serve them.

All of you with older children are needed in your homes. Yes, there are frustrations, but there are lots of joys. Look for them! Having raised four industrious sons, I learned a thing or two about being an instrument: Enjoy the energy of these years! Make your home a safe, happy, relaxed place where friends are welcome. Listen, love, share your stories of your childhood and teenage years with your children.

Have expectations for your children. We had a curfew and told our sons that the Holy Ghost goes to bed at midnight. When they didn't come home, a few times the Holy Ghost told me to go out and find them. That surprised a few of their dates! We laugh about that now—but I must admit, laughter comes easier as they have grown older.

Be there for your children. Sit on the bed and enjoy the late-night talks—try to stay awake! Pray for the Lord to inspire you. Forgive often. Choose your battles. Testify frequently of Jesus Christ and His goodness and of the Restoration. And most of all, let them know of your trust in the Lord.

If your children are grown and gone; if you are single, divorced, or widowed; don't let your circumstance dictate your willingness to share your life experiences. Your voice is needed.

In a Relief Society Sunday lesson in my ward, we were discussing what makes a good marriage. One sister, Lisa, said: "I probably shouldn't say anything because I'm divorced. But what keeps me going is my temple covenants." After the lesson, I asked some new young adult Relief Society sisters what in this lesson had connected to them. They said, "Lisa's comment impacted us most."

Now, my dear older sisters, I see God's image in your noble countenances. How your wisdom, patience, and experience have touched so many lives! My amazing mother-in-law, Mary, in her 90s used to say, "People think because I'm old I don't know anything." Let me tell you what she knew and what she did. While living in a senior residence, Mary asked the manager if they could use a room for church services. He told her no because the center was nondenominational. She refused to accept his answer! With some other senior sisters, Mary persisted until the company provided a room. Soon a branch was organized, and members were meeting each Sunday to partake of the sacrament and renew their covenants. Age is not a barrier to becoming an instrument in the hands of God.

There are countless ways to be instruments in God's hands. For example, be the kind of visiting teacher you've always wanted; ask a young single adult about what she likes to do rather than why she's not married; share instead of accumulate; carefully choose your dress, speech, and choice of entertainment; smile at your husband or child who knows they've caused frustration and heartache; put your arm around a young woman; teach in nursery with a happy heart; show by your attitude that you are finding joy in the journey. The Prophet Joseph said of such efforts, "If you live up to your privilege[s], the angels cannot be restrained from being your associates."⁶

I testify we are engaged in the work of God. Thank you for your devotion to your families, to Relief Society, and to the Church. Thank you for being instruments in the hands of God to bring about this great work. May you feel God's love in your lives and may you share that love with others is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. *Instruments in the Hands of God* (video shown during the 2005 general Relief Society meeting).
2. Relief Society Minutes, Apr. 28, 1842, Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 38.
3. Alma 26:3.
4. Relief Society Minutes, Apr. 28, 1842, 34.
5. Personal correspondence.
6. Relief Society Minutes, Apr. 28, 1842, 38.