

Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society

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Studying the history of Relief Society gives definition and expression to who we are as disciples and followers of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

This meeting is a gift to all of Heavenly Father's daughters who desire to learn His mind and will and understand their responsibilities in His plan. I have visited many of you this past year, and my heart has been touched as I have looked into your eyes, hugged you, laughed with you, cried with you, and listened to your grief, joy, and triumph. Each of you is precious beyond description and known by our Heavenly Father. As daughters of God, you are preparing for eternal designations, and each of you has a female identity, nature, and responsibility. The success of families, communities, this Church, and the precious plan of salvation is dependent on your faithfulness. Oh, dear sisters, how we love and pray for you!

All of us are in the middle of a very personal mortal experience. Two sisters I have met recently represent how to live faithfully. One sister lives in central Brazil. Her lovely redbrick home, set in a yard of red soil, surrounded by a wall of red blocks, is a haven and refuge from the world outside. Her bright-eyed children know how to sing Primary songs, and on the walls of her home hang pictures of the Savior, temples, and prophets of God cut from the *Liahona* magazine. She and her husband made personal sacrifices to be sealed in the temple so their children could be born in the covenant. She told me that she prays continually for the Lord to give her strength and inspiration sufficient to bring up her children in the light, truth, and strength of the gospel.

Another sister lives alone in a tiny apartment on the 80th floor of a building in Hong Kong. She has some physical difficulties, but she is cheerfully independent. She is the only member of the Church in her family. On a little shelf are her scriptures, her Relief Society manuals, and other Church books. She has created a Spirit-filled haven in her home, and she is a light to everyone in her branch.

Warnings

We know that many sisters live in oppressive or dangerous circumstances. Some are constantly hungry, and some must summon daily courage to continue in faith despite disappointments and being betrayed by others. Because we are living in the last days of this earth, there are signs of a great struggle everywhere. Myths and misperceptions regarding the strength, purpose, and position of Latter-day Saint women abound. Prevailing myths imply that we are of lower importance than men, that we are generally sweet but uninformed, and that no matter what we do, we will never be enough to be accepted by our Heavenly Father. As the Apostle Peter said, there are "false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that

bought them.”¹

The Book of Mormon describes what is happening:

“For behold, at that day shall [Satan] rage in the hearts of the children of men, and stir them up to anger against that which is good.

“And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell.

“And behold, others he flattereth away, and telleth them there is no hell; and he saith unto them: I am no devil, for there is none—and thus he whispereth in their ears, until he grasps them with his awful chains.”²

In the growing climate of entitlement, excuse, apathy, and enticement, daughters of God who are not watchful, prayerful, and inspired are increasingly at risk of becoming what the scriptures describe as “silly women”³ who worship a variety of “strange gods.”⁴ Sadly, as a result of life’s difficulties and the world’s popular heresies, many sisters believe the myths more than the truth. Their misalignment with God’s plan is demonstrated in findings that many are not doing essential things such as praying and reading scriptures. The Lord Himself has said that “this is a day of warning, and not a day of many words.”⁵

Relief Society Was Organized to Be a Defense and a Refuge

In order to watch over, teach, and inspire His daughters in these perilous times, God authorized the Prophet Joseph Smith to organize the women of the Church. This divinely appointed and priesthood-directed organization is called Relief Society.

The purpose of Relief Society is to prepare daughters of God for the blessings of eternal life as they increase in faith and personal righteousness, strengthen families and homes, and seek out and help others who are in need.

Relief Society clarifies our work and unifies us as daughters of God in defense of His plan. In this day of mistaken identities, confusion, and distraction, Relief Society is meant to be a compass and guide to teach the truth to faithful women. Righteous women today seek an outpouring of revelation to resist distractions, fight evil and spiritual destruction, and rise above personal disasters by increasing their faith, strengthening their families, and providing relief to others.

History and Work of Relief Society

Our presidency has prayed, fasted, pondered, and counseled with prophets, seers, and revelators to learn what God would have us do to help His daughters be strong in the face of “the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth.”⁶ An answer has come that the sisters of the Church should know and learn from the history of Relief Society. Understanding the history of Relief Society strengthens the foundational identity and worth of faithful women.

In consequence of this, a history of Relief Society for the Church is being completed and will be available for our use next year. In anticipation of this, Relief Society history is receiving increased attention, such as on the visiting teaching page of the *Liahona* and the *Ensign*. The preparation of the history has been an inspired and

revelatory experience.

As we have studied the history of Relief Society, we have learned that the Lord's vision and purpose for Relief Society was not of a sleepy meeting on Sunday. He had in mind something much, much bigger than a women's club or special-interest entertainment group.

He intended Relief Society to help build His people and prepare them for the blessings of the temple. He established this organization to align His daughters with His work and to enlist their help in building His kingdom and strengthening the homes of Zion.

History Teaches Us Who We Are

We study our history to learn who we are. There is a worldwide hunger among good women to know their identity, value, and importance. Studying and applying the history of Relief Society gives definition and expression to who we are as disciples and followers of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Our faithfulness and service are signs of our conversion and commitment to remember and follow Him. In July of 1830, at the beginning of the Restoration of His Church, the Lord selected His first female leader of this dispensation, and in a revelation to her, He said, "I speak unto you, Emma Smith, my daughter; for verily I say unto you, all those who receive my gospel are sons and daughters in my kingdom."⁷

The history of Relief Society teaches us that our Heavenly Father knows His daughters. He loves them, He has given them specific responsibilities, and He has spoken to and guided them during their mortal missions. Additionally, the history of Relief Society elevates and validates the standing of women and demonstrates how they work in companionship with faithful priesthood leaders.

History Teaches Us What We Are to Do

We study our history to learn what we are to do. Through our history we learn how to prepare for the blessings of eternal life. The Relief Society as an organization has always had the responsibility to organize the energies of the sisters in the wards and branches of Zion. Through Relief Society meetings, the ministry of visiting teachers, and their combined service, daughters of God are taught, watched over, and inspired in their responsibility in the Lord's work and kingdom. Ward and branch Relief Society presidents are set apart to direct that work.

One year ago at this meeting, policies regarding Relief Society meetings were announced. We are happy to report that in most wards and branches throughout the world, Relief Society presidencies and sisters have embraced those policies and the spirit behind them. It has been a joy to see a rejuvenation of the historical purpose and work of Relief Society. We have also seen an increase in the dignity, identity, and relevance of Relief Society as all meetings of the sisters are now simply named and announced what they are—Relief Society meetings. We are seeing an increase of faith and personal righteousness, a strengthening of families and homes, and more relief being offered by Relief Society sisters through the correct use of Relief Society meetings. All policies regarding Relief Society meetings, visiting teaching, and other Relief Society work have their foundation in the history of Relief Society and are approved by the First Presidency.

It has always been a responsibility of Relief Society to participate in the work of salvation. From the beginning of the restored Church, the sisters have been there first, last, and always in responding to the happenings of everyday life. From Relief Society, sisters go forth to serve in Primary, Young Women, Sunday School, and other

efforts, and they are beacons of light and virtue to the rising generation. Personal service builds each individual sister, and the united service of millions of faithful women creates a formidable force of faith in the Lord's work. History shows that since the beginning of the Restoration, sisters have been at the forefront in sharing the gospel, and they continue this effort as they serve missions, prepare young men and women to serve missions, and invite their friends, neighbors, and family members to share in the blessings of the gospel. We also learn from history that the Prophet Joseph Smith used Relief Society meetings to instruct the sisters in their preparation for the temple. Today, family history and temple work continue to be some of the primary obligations of Relief Society.

Our understanding of our historical purpose helps women learn to prioritize properly so they will “not spend money for that which is of no worth, nor [their] labor for that which cannot satisfy.”⁸ Relief Society has always had the responsibility to do as the Apostle Paul taught—to teach young women to be sober, discreet, and chaste and to teach those who are married to love their husbands, love their children, and strengthen their homes.⁹ The history of Relief Society teaches us to take care of the essential things which will save and sanctify us and the things which are necessary to make us personally self-reliant and useful in the Lord's kingdom.

A constant theme through our history is that sisters who utilize the power of the Holy Ghost operate with the inspiration of the Lord in their lives and receive revelation for their responsibilities.

History Unites Faithful Women

We study our history because it unites faithful women. The history of Relief Society is a Spirit-filled story of strong, faithful, purposeful women. As a part of the Lord's restored Church, Relief Society can now be found in nearly 170 nations. Everywhere in the world adult women in the Lord's Church can be given serious and important responsibilities.

Young girls and young women in the Church learn to set goals through the Faith in God and Personal Progress programs, which focus them toward the temple and their future responsibilities. In Relief Society they continue to progress toward the blessings of the temple and eternal life by increasing their faith and personal righteousness, strengthening their families and homes, and seeking out and helping those who are in need. Faithful sisters learn to do this with very little applause or recognition for the work they do. That is because Relief Society thrives on the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, who said that when we give our alms (or offerings) in secret, our Father in Heaven, who sees in secret, will reward us openly.¹⁰

Through the history and work of Relief Society, we are connected to a great worldwide sisterhood of young and old, rich and poor, educated and illiterate, single and married, strong and immovable daughters of God.

Knowledge of History Can Help Us Change

We study our history because it helps us change. Ultimately, the value of history is not so much in its dates, times, and places. It is valuable because it teaches us the principles, purposes, and patterns we are to follow, it helps us know who we are and what we are to do, and it unites us in strengthening the homes of Zion and building the kingdom of God on the earth. Relief Society, when it operates in an inspired way, can replace fear, doubt, and selfishness with faith, hope, and charity. As we move the Lord's work forward, the history of Relief Society will continue to be written by faithful sisters throughout the world. The Lord is strengthening Relief Society in the living present and preparing a glorious future for His daughters.

I bear you my testimony of the reality of our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, the gospel, the good news of our identity and purpose, was restored to the earth. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. 2 Peter 2:1.

2. 2 Nephi 28:20–22.

3. 2 Timothy 3:6.

4. Joshua 24:23.

5. Doctrine and Covenants 63:58.

6. Doctrine and Covenants 1:17.

7. Doctrine and Covenants 25:1.

8. 2 Nephi 9:51.

9. See Titus 2:4–5.

10. See Matthew 6:4; 3 Nephi 13:4.