

# What I Hope My Granddaughters (and Grandsons) Will Understand about Relief Society

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From the day the gospel began to be restored in this dispensation, the Lord has needed faithful women to participate as His disciples.

It is a privilege to address you at this historic meeting. It is a blessing for us to be together. During my service as Relief Society general president, I have developed a deep love for the Relief Society sisters of this Church, and the Lord has expanded my vision of how He feels about us and what He expects of us.

I have titled this message “What I Hope My Granddaughters (and Grandsons) Will Understand about Relief Society.” My oldest granddaughters are busily working in Personal Progress and developing the habits and traits of righteous womanhood. Soon they and their peers will carry the responsibility for this great worldwide sisterhood.

I hope what I say in this message will give them and all who hear or read it a clear understanding of what the Lord had in mind for His daughters when Relief Society was organized.

## An Ancient Pattern of Discipleship

I hope my granddaughters will understand that Relief Society today is organized after a pattern of discipleship that existed in the ancient Church. When the Savior organized His Church in New Testament times, “women were vital participants in [His] ministry.”<sup>1</sup> He visited Martha and Mary, two of His most dedicated followers, in Martha’s home. As Martha listened to Him and served Him according to the custom of their time, He helped her see that she could do more than that. He helped Martha and Mary understand that they could choose “that good part,” which would not be taken from them.<sup>2</sup> This gentle comment served as an invitation to participate in the Lord’s ministry. And later in the New Testament, Martha’s strong testimony of the Savior’s divinity gives us some insight into her faith and discipleship.<sup>3</sup>

As we read further in the New Testament, we learn that the Apostles continued to establish the Lord’s Church. We also learn about faithful women whose discipleship contributed to the growth of the Church. Paul spoke of female disciples in places such as Ephesus<sup>4</sup> and Philippi.<sup>5</sup> But as the Lord’s Church was lost in apostasy, this pattern of discipleship was also lost.

As the Lord began restoring His Church through the Prophet Joseph Smith, He again included women in a

pattern of discipleship. A few months after the Church was formally organized, the Lord revealed that Emma Smith was to be set apart as a leader and teacher in the Church and as an official helper to her husband, the Prophet.<sup>6</sup> In her calling to help the Lord build His kingdom, she was given instructions about how to increase her faith and personal righteousness, how to strengthen her family and her home, and how to serve others.

I hope my granddaughters will understand that from the day the gospel began to be restored in this dispensation, the Lord has needed faithful women to participate as His disciples.

Just one example of their extraordinary contribution was in missionary work. The great growth of the early Church was made possible because faithful men were willing to leave their families to travel to unknown places and suffer privations and hardship to teach the gospel. However, these men understood that their missions would not have been possible without the full faith and partnership of the women in their lives, who sustained homes and businesses and earned income for their families and the missionaries. The sisters also cared for the thousands of converts who gathered in their communities. They were deeply committed to a new way of life, helping build the Lord's kingdom and participating in His work of salvation.

## Connected with the Priesthood

I hope my granddaughters will understand that the Lord inspired the Prophet Joseph Smith to organize the women of the Church “under the priesthood after the pattern of the priesthood”<sup>7</sup> and to teach them “how [they] would come in possession of the privileges, blessings and gifts of the Priesthood.”<sup>8</sup>

When Relief Society was officially organized, Emma Smith continued in her calling as a leader. She was named as president of the organization, with two counselors to serve with her in a presidency. Rather than being selected by popular vote, as was common in organizations outside of the Church, this presidency was called by revelation, sustained by those they would lead, and set apart by priesthood leaders to serve in their callings, thus being “called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority.”<sup>9</sup> Being organized under the priesthood made it possible for the presidency to receive direction from the Lord and His prophet for a specific work. The organization of Relief Society enabled the Lord's storehouse of talent, time, and means to be administered in wisdom and order.

That first group of women understood that they had been given authority to teach, inspire, and organize the sisters as disciples to assist in the Lord's work of salvation. In their first meetings the sisters were taught the guiding purposes of Relief Society: to increase faith and personal righteousness, strengthen families and homes, and seek out and help those in need.

I hope my granddaughters will understand that the organization of Relief Society was an essential part of preparing the Saints for the privileges, blessings, and gifts found only in the temple. President Joseph Fielding Smith taught that Relief Society “is a vital part of the kingdom of God on earth” and “is so designed and operated that it helps its faithful members to gain eternal life in our Father's kingdom.”<sup>10</sup> We can imagine what it must have been like for the sisters to be in Joseph Smith's Red Brick Store at those first Relief Society meetings, facing the hill where a temple was being built as the Prophet taught them that “there should be a select society, separate from all the evils of the world, choice, virtuous, and holy.”<sup>11</sup>

I hope my granddaughters value the temple as did the sisters of the first Relief Society, who believed that temple blessings were the grand prize and great goal of every Latter-day Saint woman. I hope that, like early Relief

Society sisters, my granddaughters will strive daily to become sufficiently mature to make and keep sacred temple covenants and that when they do go to the temple, they will pay attention to all that is said and done. Through the blessings of the temple, they will be armed with power<sup>12</sup> and blessed to receive “the key of the knowledge of God.”<sup>13</sup> Through the ordinances of the priesthood found only in temples, they will be blessed to fulfill their divine, eternal responsibilities, and they will promise to live as committed disciples. I am grateful that one of the Lord’s primary purposes in organizing Relief Society was to give the women the responsibility to help each other prepare “for the greater blessings of the priesthood found in the ordinances and covenants of the temple.”<sup>14</sup>

## The Refuge and Influence of a Worldwide Sisterhood

I hope my granddaughters will come to understand the important influence and capacity of the great worldwide sisterhood of Relief Society. Since 1842 the Church has spread well beyond Nauvoo, and Relief Society is now found in over 175 countries, where sisters speak more than 80 languages. Every week new wards and branches are organized, and new Relief Societies become part of an ever-expanding sisterhood, “spread across the continents.”<sup>15</sup> When Relief Society was relatively small in numbers and was organized mainly in Utah, its leaders could focus much of their organization and discipleship on local social programs and interconnected relief work. They developed home industries and carried out projects to build hospitals and store grain. Those early Relief Society efforts helped establish patterns of discipleship which are now applied globally. As the Church has grown, Relief Society is now able to fulfill its purposes in every ward and branch, in every stake and district, while adapting in an ever-changing world.

Every day, Relief Society sisters around the world experience the entire range of mortal challenges and experiences. Women and their families today live face to face with unrealized expectations; mental, physical, and spiritual illness; accidents; and death. Some sisters suffer loneliness and disappointment because they do not have families of their own, and others suffer from the consequences of poor choices made by family members. Some have experienced war or hunger or natural disasters, and others are learning about the strain of addictions, unemployment, or insufficient education and training. All of these difficulties have the potential to bleach the bones of faith and exhaust the strength of individuals and families. One of the Lord’s purposes in organizing the sisters into a discipleship was to provide relief that would lift them above “all that hinders the joy and progress of woman.”<sup>16</sup> In every ward and branch, there is a Relief Society with sisters who can seek and receive revelation and counsel with priesthood leaders to strengthen each other and work on solutions that are applicable in their own homes and communities.

I hope my granddaughters will understand that through Relief Society, their discipleship is extended and they can become engaged with others in the kind of impressive and heroic work the Savior has done. The kind of work the sisters of this Church are asked to do in our day has never been too modest in scope or inconsequential to the Lord. Through their faithfulness, they can feel His approval and be blessed with the companionship of His Spirit.

My granddaughters should also know that the sisterhood of Relief Society can provide a place of safety, refuge, and protection.<sup>17</sup> As our times become ever more difficult, the faithful sisters of Relief Society will unite to protect the homes of Zion from the shrill voices of the world and the predatory and provocative influence of the adversary. And through Relief Society, they will be taught and strengthened and taught and strengthened more, and the influence of righteous women can bless many more of our Father’s children.

## A Discipleship of Watchcare and Ministering

I hope my granddaughters will understand that visiting teaching is an expression of their discipleship and a significant way to honor their covenants. This element of our discipleship should closely resemble the ministry of our Savior. In the early days of Relief Society, a visiting committee from each ward received an assignment to assess needs and collect donations to be distributed to those in need. Throughout the years, Relief Society sisters and leaders have learned one step at a time and have improved in their ability to watch over others. There have been times when sisters have focused more on completing visits, teaching lessons, and leaving notices when they have stopped by their sisters' homes. These practices have helped sisters learn patterns of watchcare. Just as people in the time of Moses concentrated on keeping long lists of rules, the sisters of Relief Society have at times imposed many written and unwritten rules upon themselves in their desire to understand how to strengthen one another.

With so much need for relief and rescue in the lives of sisters and their families today, our Heavenly Father needs us to follow a higher path and demonstrate our discipleship by sincerely caring for His children. With this important purpose in mind, leaders are now taught to ask for reports about the spiritual and temporal well-being of sisters and their families and about service rendered.<sup>18</sup> Now visiting teachers have the responsibility to “sincerely come to know and love each sister, help her strengthen her faith, and give service.”<sup>19</sup>

As committed disciples of the Savior, we are improving in our ability to do the things He would do if He were here. We know that to Him it is our caring that counts, and so we are trying to concentrate on caring about our sisters rather than completing lists of things to do. True ministry is measured more by the depth of our charity than by the perfection of our statistics. We will know we are successful in our ministry as visiting teachers when our sisters can say, “My visiting teacher helps me grow spiritually” and “I know that my visiting teacher cares deeply about me and my family” and “If I have problems, I know my visiting teacher will take action without waiting to be invited.” Leaders who understand the importance of ministering to others will counsel together to seek and receive revelation about how to edify visiting teachers and how to organize and carry out an inspired ministry.

Additionally, visiting teaching is an extension of the bishop's charge to care for the Lord's flock. The bishop and Relief Society president need the service of inspired visiting teachers to assist them in fulfilling their responsibilities. Through the ministry of visiting teachers, a Relief Society president can be aware of the well-being of each sister in the ward and report about their well-being when she visits with her bishop.

President Thomas S. Monson has taught us that “when we strive with faith nothing wavering to fulfill the duties appointed to us, when we seek the inspiration of the Almighty in the performance of our responsibilities, we can achieve the miraculous.”<sup>20</sup> I hope my granddaughters will participate in miracles as they help visiting teaching become a pattern of discipleship that the Lord will recognize when He comes again.

## Fulfilling the Purposes of Relief Society

These and other essential teachings about Relief Society are now available for my granddaughters to study in *Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society*. This book contains a record of the legacy of Relief Society and the women of this Church. It will unify and align a worldwide sisterhood with the purposes of Relief Society and the patterns and privileges of disciples. It is a witness of women's essential role in our Father's

plan of happiness, and it provides an immovable standard of what we believe, what we do, and what we will defend. The First Presidency has encouraged us to “study this book and allow its timeless truths and inspiring examples to influence [our] lives.”<sup>21</sup>

Knowing that the organization of Relief Society was divinely created, President Joseph F. Smith told Relief Society sisters: “It is for you to lead the world and to lead especially the women of the world. ... You are the head,” he said, “not the tail.”<sup>22</sup> As the time of the Lord’s return grows closer, I hope my granddaughters will become strong, faithful women who apply the principles and patterns of Relief Society in their lives. As Relief Society becomes a way of life for them, I hope they will serve in unity with others to fulfill its divine purposes. I have a testimony of the true restored Church of Jesus Christ, and I am grateful for the pattern of discipleship that was restored when the Lord inspired the Prophet Joseph Smith to organize Relief Society. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. *Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society* (2011), 3.

2. See Luke 10:38–42.

3. See John 11:20–27.

4. See Acts 18:24–26; Romans 16:3–5.

5. See Philippians 4:1–4.

6. See Doctrine and Covenants 25.

7. Joseph Smith, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 12.

8. Joseph Smith, in *History of the Church*, 4:602.

9. Articles of Faith 1:5.

10. Joseph Fielding Smith, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 97.
11. Joseph Smith, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 15.
12. See Doctrine and Covenants 109:22; see also Sheri L. Dew, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 128.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 84:19; see also Ezra Taft Benson, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 129.
14. *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 131.
15. Boyd K. Packer, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 99.
16. John A. Widtsoe, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 25.
17. See *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 86–87.
18. See *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 9.5.4.
19. *Handbook 2*, 9.5.1.
20. Thomas S. Monson, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 91.
21. First Presidency, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, ix.
22. Joseph F. Smith, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 66.

