

Rise Up in Strength, Sisters in Zion

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To be converted covenant keepers, we need to study the essential doctrines of the gospel and have an unshakable testimony of their truthfulness.

What joy it is to be gathered in this Conference Center with the girls, young women, and women of the Church. We are also very aware that there are thousands of other groups of sisters, gathered throughout the world, watching these proceedings, and I'm grateful for the opportunity and means that allow us to join together in unity and purpose this evening.

In October 2006, President Gordon B. Hinckley gave a talk entitled "Rise Up, O Men of God," named after a hymn written in 1911.¹ It was a call to action for the men of the Church to rise up and improve themselves. That talk has echoed in my mind as I have prayed to know what to share with you.

Sisters, we live in "perilous times."² The conditions of our day should not be a surprise to us. They have been foretold for millennia as a warning and admonition so that we can be prepared. The 8th chapter of Mormon gives a disconcertingly accurate description of the conditions of our day. In this chapter, Moroni says he has seen our day, and it includes wars and rumors of wars, great pollutions, murders, robbing, and people who tell us that there is no right or wrong in God's eyes. He describes people who are filled with pride, caught up in the wearing of expensive clothing, and who make fun of religion. He is shown people who are so obsessed with worldly things that they allow "the needy, and the naked, and the sick and the afflicted to pass by"³ without being noticed.

Moroni asks a soul-searching question of us—we who are living in these times. He says, "Why are ye ashamed to take upon you the name of Christ?"⁴ This indictment accurately describes the increasingly secular condition of our world.

Joseph Smith—Matthew indicates that in the last days even the "very elect ... according to the covenant"⁵ will be deceived. Those of the covenant include the girls, young women, and sisters of the Church who have been baptized and made covenants with their Heavenly Father. Even we are at risk of being deceived by false teachings.

Sisters, I don't believe that conditions are going to improve going forward. If current trends are an indication, we need to be prepared for the storms that lie ahead. It would be easy to throw our hands up in despair, but as covenant people we need never despair. As Elder Gary E. Stevenson has said, "Heavenly Father's generous

compensation for living in perilous times is that we also live in the fulness of times."⁶ I love the comfort of that statement.

President Russell M. Nelson told us a year ago: "Attacks against the Church, its doctrine, and our way of life are going to increase. Because of this, we need women who have a bedrock understanding of the doctrine of Christ and who will use that understanding to teach and help raise a sin-resistant generation. We need women who can detect deception in all of its forms. We need women who know how to access the power that God makes available to covenant keepers and who express their beliefs with confidence and charity. We need women who have the courage and vision of our Mother Eve."⁷

This message reassures me that despite the conditions of our day, we have many reasons to rejoice and be optimistic. I believe with all of my heart that we sisters do have the innate strength and faith that will allow us to meet the challenges of living in the last days. Sister Sheri Dew has written, "I believe that the moment we learn to unleash the full influence of converted, covenant-keeping women, the kingdom of God will change overnight."⁸

It will take concerted effort to be converted and to keep our covenants. To do so, we need to be girls and women who study the essential doctrines of the gospel and have an unshakable testimony of their truthfulness. There are three areas I believe are foundational to strong testimonies and that I consider to be essential to our understanding.

First, we need to acknowledge the centrality of God our Eternal Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, to our faith and salvation. Jesus Christ is our Savior and Redeemer. We need to study and understand His Atonement and how to apply it daily; repentance is one of the greatest blessings each of us has to stay on course. We need to see Jesus Christ as our primary role model and the example of who we need to become. We need to continually teach our families and classes about our Father's great plan of salvation, which includes the doctrine of Christ.

Second, we need to understand the need for the restoration of the doctrine, organization, and keys of authority in these latter days. We need to have a witness that the Prophet Joseph Smith was divinely chosen and appointed by the Lord to bring about this restoration and recognize that he organized the women of the Church after the organization that existed in Christ's Church anciently.⁹

And third, we need to study and understand temple ordinances and covenants. The temple holds a place at the very center of our most sacred beliefs, and the Lord asks that we attend, ponder, study, and find personal meaning and application individually. We will come to understand that through the ordinances of the temple, the power of godliness is manifest in our lives¹⁰ and that because of temple ordinances, we can be armed with God's power, and His name will be upon us, His glory round about us, and

His angels have charge over us.¹¹ I wonder if we are fully drawing upon the power of those promises.

Sisters, even the very youngest in this audience can rise up in faith and play a significant role in building the kingdom of God. Children begin gaining their own testimonies by reading or listening to the scriptures, praying daily, and partaking of the sacrament in a meaningful way. All children and young women can encourage family home evenings and be full participants. You can be the first one on your knees as your family gathers for family prayer. Even if your homes are less than ideal, your personal examples of faithful gospel living can influence the lives of your family and friends.

Young women of the Church need to see themselves as essential participants in the priesthood-directed work of salvation and not just as onlookers and supporters. You hold callings and are set apart by those holding priesthood keys to function as leaders with power and authority in this work. As you magnify your callings in class presidencies and prepare spiritually, counsel together, reach out to minister to your class members, and teach one another the gospel, you are taking your place in this work and both you and your peers will be blessed.

All women need to see themselves as essential participants in the work of the priesthood. Women in this Church are presidents, counselors, teachers, members of councils, sisters, and mothers, and the kingdom of God cannot function unless we rise up and fulfill our duties with faith. Sometimes we just need to have a greater vision of what is possible.

I recently met a sister in Mexico who understands what it means to magnify her calling with faith. Marfissa Maldonado was called to teach a youth Sunday School class three years ago. She had 7 students attending when she was called, but she now has 20 who attend regularly. I asked her, in amazement, what she had done to bring about such an increase in numbers. She modestly said, "Oh, it wasn't just me. All the class members helped." Together, they saw the names of the less-actives on the roll and began to go out together and invite them to come back to church. They have also had a baptism because of their efforts.

Sister Maldonado set up a social media site just for her class members called "I Am a Child of God," and she posts inspirational thoughts and scriptures several times a week. She regularly texts her students with assignments and encouragement. She feels it is important to communicate in the ways they best relate to, and it is working. She told me simply, "I love my students." I could feel that love as she told me of their efforts, and her example reminded me of what one person of faith and action can accomplish in this work with the help of the Lord.

Our youth are being exposed to difficult questions on a daily basis, and many of us have loved ones who are struggling to find answers. The good news is that there *are* answers to the questions being asked. Listen to the recent messages from our leaders. We are being urged to study and understand our Heavenly Father's plan of

happiness. We have been reminded of the principles in the family proclamation.¹² We are encouraged to teach and use these resources as the measuring sticks to keep us on the strait and narrow path.

About a year ago, I visited with a mother of young children who decided to take a proactive approach to inoculating her children against the many negative influences they were being exposed to online and at school. She chooses a topic each week, often one that has generated a lot of discussion online, and she initiates meaningful discussions during the week when her children can ask questions and she can make sure they're getting a balanced and fair perspective on the often-difficult issues. She is making her home a safe place to raise questions and have meaningful gospel instruction.

I worry that we live in such an atmosphere of avoiding offense that we sometimes altogether avoid teaching correct principles. We fail to teach our young women that preparing to be a mother is of utmost importance because we don't want to offend those who aren't married or those who can't have children, or to be seen as stifling future choices. On the other hand, we may also fail to emphasize the importance of education because we don't want to send the message that it is more important than marriage. We avoid declaring that our Heavenly Father defines marriage as being between a man and woman because we don't want to offend those who experience same-sex attraction. And we may find it uncomfortable to discuss gender issues or healthy sexuality.

Certainly, sisters, we need to use sensitivity, but let us also use our common sense and our understanding of the plan of salvation to be bold and straightforward when it comes to teaching our children and youth the essential gospel principles they must understand to navigate the world in which they live. If we don't teach our children and youth true doctrine—and teach it clearly—the world will teach them Satan's lies.

I love the gospel of Jesus Christ, and I am eternally grateful for the direction, power, and daily help I receive as a covenant daughter of God. I testify that the Lord has blessed us, as women who live in these perilous times, with all of the power, gifts, and strength that are needed in order to prepare the world for the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. I pray that we may all see our true potential and rise up to become the women of faith and courage our Father in Heaven needs us to be. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.