

Testimonies of the Restoration
(panel discussion)

Bonnie D. Parkin (moderator), Kristen Oaks, Susan Bednar, Jean S. Groberg

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For further information write:
BYU Women's Conference
352 Harman Continuing Education Building
Provo, Utah 84602
801-422-7692
E-mail: womens_conference@byu.edu
Home page: <http://womensconference.byu.edu>

Sister Parkin: President Hinckley often reminds me that we as women need to be together in an environment that bolsters faith. We're here to do that today. And so this morning we're going to talk about our testimonies of the Restoration. I'd like to start where the Restoration began: with Joseph Smith. We'd like to hear from each of you, how you've learned to know that Joseph Smith was a prophet--your own personal knowledge, what happened for you. How about you, Sister Groberg? Would you like to start?

Sister Groberg: Thank you. You know, my testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith has been a ray of sunshine in my life from the earliest awareness of who I was and who others in my life were: Mother, Daddy, and big sister Marilyn loved me. We went to church together every Sunday. Jesus and Heavenly Father loved me. And Joseph Smith prayed, and They answered the young boy's prayer. It all made perfect sense, and we had a living prophet to teach us what to do. As those precious seeds of testimony were planted in my young heart, they have been nurtured and nourished with life's experiences and confirmed by the Holy Ghost, and have grown naturally into a sure knowledge that has been the beacon light of my life.

Sister Parkin: Sister Bednar.

Sister Bednar: Well, I feel much the same as Sister Groberg. The seeds of faith and testimony were planted by my wonderful parents as a child growing up in their home. I remember the feelings I felt as a young adult here at BYU. I could sense that my testimony was growing and being strengthened, and then, like Sister Groberg, time and experience, and working in a covenant relationship with my husband, have solidified and anchored my testimony. I would like to share an experience that I had that strengthened my testimony in Joseph Smith and particularly the Book of Mormon. More than 20 years ago, my husband was invited to coauthor a college textbook that was to be distributed on college campuses nationwide. As we were visiting one day about the finished project, he said, "Susan, I feel that one of the reasons that I felt so strongly that I needed to write this

textbook was so that I could testify that Joseph Smith did not write the Book of Mormon." As we visited, he said, "I've worked two years on this project. I have a Ph.D. in the subject about which I have written. I've had the latest and greatest in computer technology to bless me and assist me, and I've had academic peers who have reviewed and critiqued my work for clarity and content. As I've read what I've written, there's not one statement in my book that is as profound and powerful as 'wickedness never was happiness' " (Alma 41:10). I had to agree with him on that point because I had proofread the galley sheets before the book went to press. But, you know, my husband was right. Joseph Smith could not have written the Book of Mormon. It was translated by the Prophet from ancient records through the gift and power of God to convince both Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, and it has convinced me too. Sisters, I know the Book of Mormon is another testament of Jesus Christ.

Sister Parkin: Thank you. Sister Oaks.

Sister Oaks: Oh, Bonnie, I'm a little different than everyone else. I've come from a background of believing blood, and I went to Primary faithfully, and I loved Primary. But I really came to a knowledge of the gospel in my early 20s, and I met some friends who made me realize that this Church is not just a nice church; it's why we live on this earth. One friend I remember distinctly said to me--she said, "Kristen, Joseph Smith either was a prophet of God and talked to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, or he did not. This Church is either totally true or it is not." And she started me thinking. And I was working at Harvard at the time, and the Durhams are very close friends of mine--Louisa's wonderful. And so her husband started talking to me about the gospel. He was a struggling law student, and he paid tithing on his scholarship. He explained to me the plan of salvation on a piece of paper, and I remember him drawing circles, and he said, "This is where we came from, this is why we're here, and this is where we're going." And from that minute my life really changed, and I began to pay tithing. And I want to say to you, for me there's a very indelible link between the paying of a tithe and a testimony. And I want you to know--and everyone here--that I know this Church is true because it literally changed my life.

Sister Parkin: Thank you. What I'm hearing each of you say is that gaining a testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith has made a profound difference in your individual lives. Sister Bednar, I remember you telling a story that I loved a whole lot about a very challenging time in your life. You were a young mother. And I just want you to share that story with everybody here, because it's so incredibly important--important to me is the aspect because I felt very much like you did.

Sister Bednar: Well, thank you. I was a young mother, just barely 30 years old with three little boys, when a knock came at our door one evening. I opened the door to find our stake president standing on the doorstep. He said, "Susan, I don't have time to come in. I just want to inform you that your husband's going to be called as my counselor in the stake presidency." My heart started to beat, and my mind started to race as I thought of the distance that was involved with this calling. The stake center was an hour and 45 minutes from our home, and many of the branches were three or four hours away. I felt

overwhelmed and concerned. I just wondered how on earth I could support my husband in this calling. But I did support him, though not always enthusiastically. I just found myself viewing my support of him as an extreme sacrifice on my part. I focused on all the things that I was having to give up: personal time with him, family time with our children. I was enduring, but not cheerfully. I finally decided that some changes needed to be made, that I needed a change of both mind and heart. As I pleaded with the Lord, as I studied, as I pondered, as I prayed, gradually I came to know and understand the difference between sacrifice and consecration. Sacrifice, sisters, is what we give up to build the kingdom of God. Consecration is what we give. It's dedicating one's self to a holy purpose--one's self and one's family. And once I understood that better, I was able to support him more effectively. I also learned about the Savior's Atonement during that time. The Atonement of Jesus Christ doesn't just redeem us from sin, but there is a strengthening power, an enabling power, that blesses us and helps us to do things that in and of ourselves we are not able to do. I testify that I have been the recipient of that enabling grace and power, not only back then but especially the last six months, as again I've had feelings of being overwhelmed and wondering how I could effectively support my husband in his new and sacred calling. But that grace has been there, and your prayers have been with me. I thank all of you for your prayers for my husband, for me, and for my family. Thank you.

Sister Parkin: Thanks, Susan, for being so honest. I had similar feelings myself. I remember a time in our lives when my husband was at a--we were still in school. We had three small boys, and I remember he was called to serve in the bishopric. When he met with the bishop that morning, the bishop looked at him and said, "So, what time could you meet for bishopric meeting?" Jim looked at him and said, "Well, how is five o'clock in the morning on Sunday?" The bishop went along with that, so every Sunday morning, their meetings were at five a.m. The payoff was a few years down the road from that. It was when our son Matt was living in Los Angeles. He was in graduate school; they were expecting their first baby. They were very busy. But I remember the night that Matt made the phone call to home, and he said to his dad, "I don't think I can do this. I don't think I can serve in this bishopric. I don't have time. I don't see how I possibly could do this." And then Matt stopped and he said, "But Dad, I remember you served." So I'm grateful for a husband who responded to a call. What a blessing that's been to our family, not just to us immediately, but in these later years when we watch our children serving. I also think of this incredible stake president who looked at Matt when Matt said to him, "President, I'm only 25 years old," and the stake president looked at him and said, "And if you were in Brazil, you'd be the stake president." So the bottom line is example is a blessing not just to us, but to our children also. The four of us around this table are speaking as married women, but as Relief Society sisters we have varied life experiences. If you looked in this audience, is there a sister sitting by you that's just like you are? Of course not. Life takes us to unexpected places. I'm sure none of us at this table ever expected we would be sitting here. I know for sure that I didn't. So no matter our circumstances, our struggles are individual. Kristen, would you be willing to share the effect your testimony has had upon you as a single woman in a family-focused church?

Sister Oaks: [sigh] Do you have a few hours open? Sorry. Well, as you well know, I was almost 53 when I married Elder Oaks, and I truly wish, sisters, I had been 93, because I would have given more women more hope. In my experience as a single sister, and I speak of all single women--if you're divorced or a widow or a single sister who's never married. To live contentedly--and I say contentedly in this Church--we have to embrace the gospel with all our hearts. There really is not a middle ground, because the world is so harsh. And I think in Young Women we really need to know and understand that we're daughters of a Heavenly Father who loves us. But it is a challenge to find your niche in a family church. I would go to work, and I thought: I am so good at what I do. And then I would go to church, and I didn't have a family, and I thought--well, I didn't feel comfortable many times, and it was very hard. And I saw my friends--their children going on missions, and having more babies, and I wasn't part of that rite of passage. And so I had to start leaning on Heavenly Father, and what could have seemed so narrow and scarce a time in my life really blossomed into something that was so rich. And I gained an eternal perspective I never could otherwise. And I know--I want to bear my testimony, that the one thing that qualified me to marry Elder Oaks was living a very long time as a single sister in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Can I give advice?

Sister Parkin: Please.

Sister Oaks: Here goes. You might want to leave, I don't know. But I would say that time is so precious. Use every single minute of it. Sometimes when our life is not as we'd have it, we sort of stop and wait. And Bruce Hafen--Elder Hafen--said sometimes we have a hand on the temple and a hand in the world, because we don't really quite know where we should be, and I've been in those places. I have friends who seem to concentrate more on counting their calories than their blessings. Or I know people who are very consumed, and I have been, with my own deprivations--I didn't have a husband or children or finances--that I forgot about the Atonement. I didn't use prayer as effectively, and I didn't use the scriptures to lift my burdens. I've seen sisters who don't go out and serve; they wait to be served. And I want to say something: as a single sister, sometimes it's very hard to serve. And you would know what I mean as far as finding a place where you can give. But now Elder Oaks is my service project across the table. Anyway . . .

Sister Parkin: Thanks, Kristen. I believe that wonderful sentence that God and one are a family. Whatever her circumstances, every woman makes a home. The lessons that we learn, the experiences we gain because of our testimonies help us create that home that we can dwell in. And I think it also helps us understand that in our heart of hearts we're looking forward to be home with our Heavenly Father someday. Sister Bednar, you and your husband have done some wonderful things in family councils. Share with us about that.

Sister Bednar: Well, let me share just one period of time where we had a family council, and we focused on this question: do we truly want to be a forever family? And if we do, what changes do we need to make in order for that to happen? The feedback and the input that we received from our sons were remarkable. We also had the blessing and

opportunity of raising our family where there were very few members of the Church. And so we talked often--not just in family council, but often--about the power of example and the importance of them being an example at school and in the community. We always told our sons as they left, we reminded them of who they were. We said, "Remember that you represent the name of our family, remember that you represent the name of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and remember that you represent the name of the Savior." I know that talking about that often helped them to be a light wherever they went. So I'm a firm believer in family discussions and particularly family councils.

Sister Parkin: Family councils truly do bless families, I believe. You know, the other day, Sister Bednar, I was in a meeting with your dear husband, Elder Bednar. He talked about a little story in Primary that I really loved. And also Sister Tanner loved it. Will you share it with us today?

Sister Bednar: Oh, I will. Before our son turned eight, it was clearly evident that he was capable of memorizing the Articles of Faith before he was baptized, so we decided when he was seven that we would take one a month, and we would teach him the Articles of Faith. The amazing thing was that our five-year-old son, Mike, learned the Articles of Faith right along with his older brother. Well, it was during this period of time that my husband happened to be at church one day, and the Primary president came up and said, "Oh, President Bednar, we're so glad that you could come to church today to hear Mike's talk in Primary." Mike looked at his dad; his dad looked at him. They didn't know anything about this talk. The Primary president could tell that she'd put them on the spot, and she said, "Well, we'll just hear from Mike next week." My husband said, "No, wait just a few minutes; we'll be ready." He took Mike to a quiet corner of the church, and he said, "Mike, what is your favorite Article of Faith?" And Mike told him, and he said, "Why is that your favorite Article of Faith?" Mike responded, and then he said, "Can you bear your testimony? And Mike said, "Yes!" "Well," he said, "that's all you need to do. You just need to go into Primary, tell the children that we've been studying the Articles of Faith in our family, this is my favorite Article of Faith, I like this Article of Faith because, and then bear your testimony. There's your talk!" It was no sweat for me--it was the most wonderful talk he's ever given!

Sister Parkin: Thank you. Now, Sister Groberg, with 11 children it had to be Grand Central Station. How did your testimony of the Restoration influence what happened in your home?

Sister Groberg: Well, busy it was, Bonnie. I don't really recall any dull moments, but certainly a lot of happy ones. We have had our struggles, as all families do; that's part of having a family. But we have kept trying. Our testimony of the Restoration has affected everything in our lives--in our home and away from home. As parents, we don't always know if the children are actually getting the messages that we are intending in our formal teaching.

Sister Parkin: I relate to that.

Sister Groberg: But you know, they do learn from the consistent daily environment in which they're nurtured, be it positive or negative. In approaching this assignment, I couldn't resist asking our children for their perspective.

Sister Parkin: Tell us their names as you share.

Sister Groberg: "Well, having scripture reading and family home evening probably was nothing different than in other homes," says our Jane. She said, "Maybe the difference was that we actually did it every day and every week. Whether it was a family home evening lesson, an activity, or just matching up socks, we knew that Monday was our family time."

Sister Parkin: We'd like to go back to that socks story sometime.

Sister Groberg: Oh, that's quite a story. As our family evolved, so did our scripture reading. Jane recalls that at first we had a special time on Sundays for the older few that kind of knew how to read. And Jane used to be so anxious--she couldn't wait to join in with the big kids. Later on it moved on to reading every morning and every night five verses each. And actually several of our children learned first to read from following along in the Book of Mormon.

Sister Parkin: Thank you. Well, I also have a testimony of family home evening. I know that it makes a great difference in our lives. I think you do too, Kristen. It's our blessing, isn't it? There's power in bringing our families together. Sister Groberg, you spoke a few days ago about a round oak table that sits in your kitchen. Share what happened there.

Sister Groberg: Actually, our big, round oak table is in our family room, but that has been the center of and the witness to these day-in-and-day-out family learning and growing experiences. Meal times with that many, as you know, were interesting. But Dad always made it especially interesting, as he usually had a little game to play, or a quiz or contest asking the children geography, history, current events, or even name-that-tune kinds of things. Homework projects, games, puzzles, sewing, craft projects--all often shared space up at the table. But it was always the gathering place for scripture reading and family prayer. Friends of the children were often included in those activities. Some were such frequent visitors that they fit right in and took their places as one of the family. One such young girl eagerly accepted the opportunity to be voice in family prayer one night. It had been quite a while since she had been in our home, but she knew the routine and offered a lovely prayer, including the petition, "And bless Tom on his mission." Well, after some muffled snickers and the amens were said, we informed her that Tom was home from his mission, and actually kneeling on the other side of the table! Our daughter Jennie Marie remembers a time that we gathered the family together. "We had music playing in the background from *Evita*. Dad explained that as a family we always do whatever the prophet asks us. We hold family home evening, scripture study; we lived in Tonga, Hawaii, Utah, and now we're moving to Argentina." Jennie says, "That impacted me because now I want to follow the prophets no matter what they're asking us to do." Nancy, our firstborn, reflected that the gospel in her growing up was such an

integral part of our upbringing that there was no segmentation to her life. She said, "We didn't know anything different." While she was growing up, because she's the first, Dad had two jobs: business and Church. And when Church called, the other waited. When Dad was gone on long trips, Nancy says she remembers the cinnamon bears that he would leave. Each child got one each night to count down the days until he would be back. Isn't that funny? We all loved cinnamon bears.

Sister Parkin: They have chocolate ones at the bookstore.

Sister Groberg: Oh, do they? Uh oh. And then Nancy added, she says: "I think one of the great things you did, Mom, was never complain about the time and energy that the Church assignments took." I thank you, Nancy, for mentioning that, and how grateful I am, and it brings me back many years to some prophetic counsel that I received from President Bowring of the Los Angeles Temple the day we were married. He looked right at me, and he said, "Sister Groberg, don't you ever complain about being a Church widow."

Sister Parkin: Bless you. I wish I could say the same. Sister Oaks, you came into a home following Elder Oaks's first wife. What was that like for you?

Sister Oaks: Well, I came into a forever family. And I'm so glad you're around an oak table, but--thank you for getting that. But I have to speak about June Oaks, Elder Oaks's first wife, because she had left me a legacy of love. I moved in the same home, in the same neighborhood, and she had prepared, especially, her children. She could call them around her when she knew that her time was short, and she said, "I want you to love the woman that your father will marry." And it made such a difference. But they had had a thousand home evenings where she taught the gospel. They were always on the phone together at night, and Jenny (who is now 30) until she was 14 sat on her mom's lap and would practice the violin. So everyone felt totally loved and very secure that Elder Oaks loved their mother. So when I came, she had prepared a place for me. It was so wonderful. Bonnie asked me to share this. While we were doing this, I had a bridal shower, and someone sent me a thank you note, and they said, "Thank you so much. I had a wonderful time. And I was worried I'd have to show my temple recommend at the door." No, that's not the case, but it made me think about my home, and is it a place where people would want to come? And one thing--and I'm saying this as a second wife, and a mother now--June Oaks wanted her children in the home, and she wanted them together, and so that's something we've tried to do, is have everyone come and be welcome all the time. And I want--her pictures are there; her stories are there. I can testify to everyone today of the reality of eternal marriage. And we've really honored it, and we've been so blessed.

Sister Parkin: Thanks, Kristen. Wonderful. One of the requirements of receiving a testimony of the restored gospel is that we need to share it. Sometimes, first of all, we need to warn our families, and then we need to warn our neighbors. Sometimes we even have to warn our families by saying "Sit down or else!" in that family home evening. But we do have an obligation to share our feelings, and sometimes that's a little difficult. I

remember a particular situation that I had in our home. I was a young adult Relief Society leader. I had a wonderful sister named Lisa who was there. As we were in this group together, Lisa met Rick and they were married. Rick was not a member of the Church. And so one day I said to Lisa--they were married; they were living, staying in our neighborhood--I said, "Lisa, have you talked to Rick about having the missionary discussions?" And she said, "Oh no, Bonnie, I can't." She said, "I just can't." And I said, "Well, how would you feel if I ask him?" And she said, "Oh, would you?" Well, I didn't know how to do this either, but the blessing was I had sons who did know how. So Brett looked at me when I asked him this question--I said, "So how do I do it, Brett?" He said, "Mother, it's easy. All you say is, 'Is there a day next week, Rick, that'd be easy for you to meet with the missionaries?' " I tried it. "Rick, is there a day next week?" He said: "Wednesday'd be fine." So that's the blessing of having children in your home that help you do things that you don't know how to do very well. Sister Groberg, you experienced family and other opportunities to share your testimony. Talk about that--how you did it.

Sister Groberg: Well, again, family home evenings are for teaching our family the gospel, but they are also wonderful opportunities to share our testimonies with friends and neighbors. We enjoyed a lot inviting another family or some of the children's friends to occasionally join us on a Monday evening. Jane, our daughter, remembers feeling that home was like a haven from the world and a light to herself and her friends. She had a high school friend who needed extra encouragement. She often spent time in our home. She overcame the challenges in her life and served a mission and was married in the temple. This friend has told Jane many times how much it helped her to feel the love and the light in our home. So we were grateful to share that. And Viki, she learned the impact of sharing her testimony with others. It was at a time when she herself was having a struggle fitting into school and with friends, because we had just returned from living in Argentina for three years. It's not always easy to fit in in Utah. But she noticed a girl in one of her classes who seemed to be very downcast. Viki slipped her a little note saying, "I want to tell you I think you're beautiful and that God loves you." After class that girl came up and they talked and found they had a lot in common. They soon became very dear friends, and their friendship remains to this day. At a later time, the friend revealed to Viki that she had been very depressed that day and had been contemplating doing something severe. This friendship is dear to both families.

Sister Parkin: Friendships. Susan, talk to us a little bit about how you've shared your testimony with members and with nonmembers. You've done some of both.

Sister Bednar: Well, let me share a nonmember story and then a member story. We did live in an area where we had lots of friends of other faiths, and we've found that giving away the pamphlet "For the Strength of Youth" was just a natural way for us to engage in gospel conversations with our friends. Our boys found it especially helpful to give this pamphlet to their coaches because it explains so beautifully our teachings about the Sabbath day observance--that Sunday is a holy day, a sacred day, and a day for worship, not a holiday or a day for practicing ball or playing in ball games. It was so helpful. Sharing testimony with family is one thing that stands out to me. A special experience that we had one day when it snowed three to four inches on a Sunday morning--we woke

up to a phone call from our home teacher telling us that church had been canceled. Now, three or four inches of snow isn't a big deal, but in Arkansas it's a great big deal. My husband, who was serving as stake president at the time, felt uncomfortable about the decision that had been made to cancel church, so we got everyone up, we dressed in our Sunday clothes, grabbed a bag of bread for the sacrament, and headed off to the church in case someone had not received that cancellation phone call. Well, it was evident after a few minutes that we were the only ones there. So, after spinning a few doughnuts in the parking lot, we went into the church and had our own family meeting. The chapel was empty that day, but the Spirit filled the room as each of our young children stood at that pulpit and testified of their feelings about the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, their love for the Savior, for scriptures, for prophets, and for family. It was truly a memory I'll never forget.

Sister Parkin: A great memory. I'll bet your sons haven't forgotten. I remember one other story--you talked about your preacher that talked on the radio, and his wife was your friend. What did you do there? Because I think it's a great story.

Sister Bednar: This was the most courageous thing I think I've ever done in my whole life. I was acquainted with a wonderful woman whose husband was a preacher. And it was a Sunday morning--every Sunday morning he hosted a radio broadcast and then would take call-in questions from his listening audience. I listened intently one morning as the subject matter was Mormonism versus Christianity.

Sister Parkin: Interesting talk.

Sister Bednar: I took copious notes, and it was evident from his presentation that he knew very little about the Prophet Joseph Smith, he'd never read the Book of Mormon, and had never had the missionary discussions. Well, anyone who listened to the program that day was misinformed and misled. I felt troubled about the situation, so during the week I pondered and prayed about it, and I finally felt prompted to make a telephone call and ask if I could come and see him at his home. Well . . .

Sister Parkin: That took some courage.

Sister Bednar: Needless to say, he was very apologetic when I arrived at his home, but we had a wonderful discussion. I told him, I said, "I just feel that as a gospel scholar, you owe yourself and your listening audience and congregation the courtesy of being better informed about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." Well, our visit was cordial and friendly, and before I left I felt prompted to bear my testimony. I'll never forget the question that he asked me after I bore that testimony. He said, "Susan, if what you are telling me is true, it is the greatest and most important thing one could ever come to know, isn't it?" And I said, "Yes. It is true, and it is the most important thing one can ever know."

Sister Parkin: Thank you. The Book of Mormon certainly does teach us that our words and our actions are parts of our testimonies. Sister Oaks, talk a little bit about what happened in the Philippines for your family.

Sister Oaks: I think the greatest thing we've ever done to bear our testimonies to our family is to actually go on a mission to the Philippines. When we came home, I watched our children and our grandchildren gather around Elder Oaks, and they listened to every word he said; they just clung to him. And I thought, we are teaching the gospel. But more than that, Bonnie, when you said actions--quiet, consistent actions tell everything. The strongest testimony I think we ever give is how we are in our homes--when we're baking our cookies, or playing with our children, or watching them. I have a dear friend, and when something is on TV that's questionable, she'll say to her children, "What do you think about that? What does it make you feel?" It's her testimony of free agency. And then I was extremely intimidated to marry Elder Oaks, and to marry an Apostle--that was hard.

Sister Parkin: We can't imagine.

Sister Oaks: Thank you. But two people that made a dramatic difference in my life--and I have to mention them because of their lives, and they were testimonies to me: Sister Ruby Haight and Sister Dantzel Nelson. And I mention Sister Haight because she was so constantly grateful. We would be together, and she looked at the weather, and the trees, and the leaves, and the flowers, and the luncheon, and the talk, and she just taught me everything was beautiful. And she'd always say, "And then let's do lunch."

Sister Parkin: We like that.

Sister Oaks: I like that. And Sister Dantzel Nelson--because we sit in order, I was next to her. And she's a mother of so many children. She just has this natural love. It just encompassed me. But she was so obedient, and I felt this. And there's a story I'd like to share; Elder Nelson was telling my husband. They were on an airplane, and he was so tired and he wanted to go lay down. There were some empty seats. And she said, "Oh no, Russell, we did not pay for those seats." It wasn't until the flight attendant explained to her that that was all right. And so, our testimony--the evidence to me is how we live shares our testimony.

Sister Parkin: Thank you. As I travel, I constantly am humbled and I'm awed by the wonderful sisters and brothers that I see, striving to live lives of dedication and goodness. I'm striving to do the same. Let me tell you about Sister Ng who I met in Hong Kong--an amazing woman. We went to visit her because her husband had passed away a few months before. Her husband had been the temple president in Hong Kong. I wish I could even let you imagine what her face looked like. She had snappy brown eyes. She glowed. She was so happy. She had a testimony that she would see her husband again. Converts to the Church, every one of them--that sat around this table--as we sat in her kitchen, was all this wonderful food, along with her family, along with her daughter, sat her Relief Society presidency. I turned to her Relief Society presidency, and I said, "So what has

Sister Ng taught you?" These women looked at me, and they were young, much younger even than I. And they looked at me, and they said, "Let me tell you what she's taught us. She's taught us the doctrine. She's helped our testimonies. She's taught us how to help and take better care of our children when we've had challenges with discipline. She's taught us how to cook." As I listened to Sister Ng's Relief Society presidency, and her smiling as they talked about her, I thought of women in my own life who have mentored me and made a difference. And I know Sister Ng would have mentored me too. That's just what happens. Those women around the world that we think we care so much for or teach, in many ways teach us in respect. Now you two sisters, Sister Groberg and Sister Oaks, you've had international experience. What's happened for you?

Sister Groberg: Well, for us it started nearly 40 years ago, when we packed up our five little girls and moved to Tonga when Elder Groberg served as mission president there. And the blessings from international association have continued ever since. We've had opportunities to travel to and serve with and, for a total of 12 years, live among wonderful people in many lands and isles of the sea, and our hearts have been opened to the great love that Heavenly Father has for all of His children. As Kristen knows, when you share daily life living with others in their own lands, you see the marvelous effect that the gospel has in their lives--these people that we've just come to love so dearly. Let me share one experience. Eighteen years ago we were just settling into our new home in Buenos Aires, Argentina. And one Sunday in Relief Society, another new sister slid onto the bench right beside me. She shyly smiled and reached out her hand and spoke her name: Sister Nagatomo. We sat side by side, neither one of us understanding a word of the Spanish lesson that was so excellently given. She sat there with her Japanese scriptures and manual, and I had my English, but, you know, there was something about the fire of testimony of truth, and the spirit of sisterhood there, that warmed us all. And faith and testimony were understood by the language of love in our hearts. It was a wonderful experience. You know, when you live where members of the Church are in the minority, the Church actually becomes a bigger part of your life. And the members become like your extended family. You're closer because the Church is a distinguishing element in their lives also. These living-away experiences have been a great blessing to all our family. Our Jennie Marie feels that hearing testimonies of the prophet and the Savior in many different languages and countries has helped her to understand that the gospel is eternal and universal, not just American. And living away, our daughter Gayle says, "Living away helps you distinguish between the gospel and the cultural aspects of Mormonism." Sometimes we don't always separate that in our thinking. Our Marilyn, I think, was very perceptive. She said that as she has observed her dad through the years of his service, she's noticed that whenever, wherever he was living or assigned, he would become totally absorbed in the people and their customs and culture, so that he could better understand and thus better love and serve them. And from this, Marilyn said, it taught her to see all people as children of God, worthy of our love and with much to teach us, as you've said. Our son John had similar feelings. He was born in Tonga, you know, but was only there a short while. But he said, now, as he looks back, traveling to the islands with his dad when he was a young boy helped him to see the great comfort that the gospel brings to everyone regardless of their level of material comfort. He said that "we learn important lessons from people that are different from us: humility, joy,

kindness, service, and brotherly love. Every culture has elements that must be abandoned to embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ. But we have more in common with active members of the Church from other cultures than we do with nonmembers in our own culture because we are all members of one house: the house of Israel, regardless of where or even when we live."

Sister Parkin: I see those remarks that are made by your children are a great exhibition to me of a woman of faith who's taught her children. Because now we're a little bit short on time because we've been having so much fun here, I think we have to go to the very last question that we were going to talk about today. The Restoration is all about light, which is the theme of our conference. I think our testimonies are not only light for others, but they're a light for us also. In conclusion, let's talk about the way that testimony--the light of testimony--has affected our individual lives. Would you feel comfortable if I got to start?

Sister Oaks: Yes.

Sister Parkin: Oh, thank you. You know, I remember being a young girl in Primary, and I remember singing the songs, and feeling the witness as we sung those songs that the gospel of Jesus Christ was true. I particularly remember singing "O how lovely was the morning!" I hadn't been to the Sacred Grove, yet I knew that what I was singing was right and was true. I'm so grateful for that sweet experience that I had in the Sacred Grove--or that experience that I had as I sat in Primary. It made a huge difference for me. Who would like to follow?

Sister Groberg: You know, it was an MIA lesson--is that okay if I speak? As a young girl, there was one particular teacher who taught a lesson that has always left an impression on me. She told the fable of Aladdin and his wonderful lamp--how Aladdin's wife, not realizing the true value of the old lamp, traded it for a shiny, new--but worthless--lamp. And then this wise teacher said, "Ask to see the genie before you trade in your old lamp." We must strive to know the true value of the gospel in our lives and never give it up--those wonderful goals that Heavenly Father has given for our happiness. Never give it up for the world's temporary glitter and glitz. Satan's counterfeits may seem flashy and fun for now, but it's a poor trade to choose them over seeking and finding the real power, glory, and eternal joy available in the gospel of Jesus Christ. I rejoice with the psalmist: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105). I love the scriptures and know that the Book of Mormon is true and was given to us, recorded by prophets especially for our time. They saw our day. They knew of our challenges and left their testimony to be a light and a guide to our path. I know that Heavenly Father lives, that our Savior Jesus Christ is His Son, that They love us, and that we are led by a living prophet today. I know that the true gospel was restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith. I'm so grateful for the Restoration and the priesthood power to seal us as families forever. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Sister Parkin: Amen. Thanks, Sister Groberg. Sister Oaks.

Sister Oaks: Oh, I love you, Sister Groberg. I was single for such a long time, and many times it was so painful in my heart, because I wanted other things and I had tender mercies from Heavenly Father. But for me, if I had to testify of one single light, it would be the temple. It's proof to me of the restored gospel. I had no priesthood in my life. My father is not LDS, and it sometimes seemed that my home teachers were on permanent vacation. But I really could go to the temple and enjoy the power of the priesthood in my life. I was denied nothing. I had every single blessing. His influence was so strong there. And I want to testify. Elder Oaks said one reason he married me is my love of the temple. And I want everyone in this room to know that I am so thankful that Joseph Smith entered the grove, and that he prayed with all his heart. I'm thankful for a Heavenly Father who loves us, for Jesus Christ who's our Savior, and for our prophet. And I say this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Sister Parkin: Amen. Thank you. Sister Bednar.

Sister Bednar: Well, when I think of the light of the gospel, I think of the light of the Holy Ghost that's been a part of my life. For many years I had the opportunity of walking with a neighbor in my neighborhood every morning. And as we became better acquainted and more comfortable with each other, we found it easy to talk about not only world events but family and even God. And I could sense that over time her heart was being drawn to spiritual things. I was so sad when she moved away. I cried. But the distance has not diminished our friendship. I remember a phone call made to me one day where she was so excited. She said, "Susan, I just can't wait to tell about the exciting things that I've been learning in my Bible study fellowship about the Holy Spirit." I could tell as she talked to me that she had felt the influence of the Holy Ghost in her life. After I hung up the phone I went to my bedroom, fell to my knees, and thanked our Father in Heaven for the gift of the Holy Ghost--a gift that I had possessed since I was a young child. For, sisters, it is by the gift and power of the Holy Ghost that I have come to know that God the Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost are three distinct and separate beings. It is by this gift and light that I have come to know that the heavens are not closed. Revelation hasn't ceased, but God continues to speak to man through living apostles and prophets. It's by this light that I've come to know the Book of Mormon is true, that Joseph Smith truly is the prophet of the Restoration, and that the restored gospel of Jesus Christ contains the fullness of the gospel. How grateful I am for the light that this gospel has been in my life, and for the gift of the Holy Ghost. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Sister Parkin: Thank you, sisters. We appreciate your willingness to share your hearts and your testimonies with all of us today. As we've gathered this morning, sisters, my sweetness has been these incredible three women that I love. We've had sweet experiences together, haven't we? I hope that each of you has felt the Spirit this morning as we've been together. As we close, let me leave with you just one final thought. Think that after the First Vision, Joseph Smith went home. He leaned against the fireplace and he talked to his mother. I think that it's significant that he went to his mother. Like mothers do, she could see that something was wrong with her son, and so she asked him. Joseph replied: "Never mind. All is well. I am well enough off." Then he said to his

mother five important words: "I have learned for myself." Aren't those essential words for all of us? "I have learned for myself." Sisters, what are you going to do when you leave here today? Will anything change for you? Do you know for yourselves that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God? We pray that what we've shared together this morning will bless you to know for yourself, and to know even more if you already know, that Joseph Smith was and is a prophet of God. Sisters, I do know for myself: Joseph Smith is and was a prophet of God. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.