

“The Legacy of a Woman of God”
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The theme for this session comes from a powerful talk given by Sister Margaret D. Nadauld, former general Young Women’s president, at the October 2000 general conference. And we are so honored today because Sister Nadauld is in attendance. I recommend that you read and study her talk, “The Joy of Womanhood.” It is a classic for all women. I still remember the spiritual confirmation which came over me when I heard Sister Nadauld express:

“Women of God can never be like women of the world. The world has enough women who are tough; we need women who are tender. There are enough women who are coarse; we need women who are kind. There are enough women who are rude; we need women who are refined. We have enough women of fame and fortune; we need more women of faith. We have enough greed; we need more goodness. We have enough vanity; we need more virtue. We have enough popularity; we need more purity.”¹

Sister Nadauld’s life is a testimonial of her personal conviction. She models each of these attributes in everything she says and does. I believe one of the ways that she became such a woman of God is that she had a mother who modeled and taught these virtues to Sister Nadauld and many others for 89 years. Sister Nadauld observed and applied her mother’s teachings in her own life and in turn taught others.

How do I know these things? I read Sister Nadauld’s mother’s obituary, which began, “Our dearly beloved Helen Bailey Dyreng ...” It continued by stating, “She was revered for her deep beauty, artistic touch, elegant entertaining, handmade quilts, beautiful writing, rolls and canning the abundance of [her husband] Morgan’s garden.”²

I like to read the obituaries found in my daily newspaper, and I’ve been reading them for years. I believe that there are good and important lessons to be learned by reading these brief

abridgments of an individual's life. My testimony and my desire to live a righteous life have been strengthened by doing so.

The chorus of a gospel pop song I enjoy begins with the words, "I want to leave a legacy. How will they remember me?"³ Will it be for _____? I'm omitting the last word because this is the question each of us should be asking ourselves continually. Interestingly enough, we are the ones who determine, by the individual choices we make and the relationships we nurture, the legacy we leave behind and how we are remembered. Will we be remembered for our tenderness, kindness, refinement, faith, goodness, virtue, and purity, as taught by Sister Nadauld? Will we be known as women of the world or women of God?

Many times, while reading the obituaries, I learn "the good, the bad, and the ugly" about an individual's life.

There are those like Sister Dyreng, who have lived a full and memorable life. Then there are those which are quite sad, and it is evident the deceased lived their life distant from the teachings of the gospel. There is a fascinating variety.

Today I'd like to share with you just a few interesting tidbits taken from my "obituary file" and what I have learned from them. I didn't know any of these individuals in mortality, but because of what I've read, I wish I had. I share these words with you because they make me reflect upon the refrain of my song, "I want to leave a legacy. How will they remember me?"

"Doris' danced to her own drummer." This brief phrase is usually a red flag that tells me that this individual's life may be different than my own. "She built hot rods and loved telling a dirty joke to good friends." Personally I would not choose to be remembered in such a way. However, the same obituary continues: "If your path was hard and muddy, 'Doris' would put you on her shoulders and carry you through. She will be dearly missed."

After reading such an obituary, I ask myself, would others express that same sentiment about me and my willingness to serve others? I'm not sure. Would I want them to? Absolutely. What am I going to do about this discovery? I guess I should become more sensitive to others' needs and strive to be more compassionate. I need to be less judgmental. These are needful lessons I'm reminded of and want to implement in my life.

A surprising number of obituaries state, "She was an avid Jazz fan."

I didn't like the worldly comment expressed by daughters about their mother: "We loved to go tanning and get manicures with our mother."

Unfortunately, I didn't have the time to attend the funeral of one woman I didn't know. I wanted to because her obituary stated that her secret recipe would be shared with all who attended the funeral.

There was Leland Wright and his family—“we will cherish fondly the memories of his personal attention.”⁴ This compliment is in keeping with a man who had served as a bishop, a counselor in two stake presidencies, a patriarch, and a temple worker. Obviously his children, in spite of the continual Church service, were the recipients of their father’s personal attention.

I liked Arthur’s happy picture and the comment, “He was the most gentle and honest man.”⁵

Alice Hafen accomplished many great things in her 97 years. And her obituary reads: “Always service oriented, her hands were never idle as she sought to do good each day. Skilled in the art of homemaking, she used her heart and hands to bless the lives of others, nourishing our bodies as well as our souls. Alice exhibited extraordinary yet simple faith and grit in challenging times. She maintained a joyful and positive perspective. She was without guile. ... She touched the lives of all within her family circle, and considered her family her most prized possession. ... She helped us unlock the knowledge of who we really are by teaching us about our forbearers and showing us what it means to truly be Christ-like.”⁶

Sometimes we are tested in mortality in ways that we may not have chosen for ourselves. Wanda Roberts’ obituary reads: “These past few years she agonized over her memory loss, but she never forgot her testimony of Jesus Christ. She never forgot to keep His commandments and express gratitude. ... Proverbs is true. ‘... for her price is far above rubies.’”⁷

I don’t know who Mr. Young was, and I don’t know if he was even a member of the Church, for Latter-day Saints are not the only ones who qualify for my obituary file. But I am sure that he adhered to these basic Christian principles, which I too hold sacred. I certainly was touched by what I read and I want to be more like him and his wife. The obituary told of his final illness and how his loving wife “battled along side him, caring for him ‘in sickness,’ true to the vows they made 66 years ago. [He] was a man of exemplary character and remarkable achievement, but most importantly he was a strong and loving husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather. He inspired us with his dedication to family and his strong work ethic; his honesty and his willingness to speak the truth in love; and his optimistic approach to life. ... He was frugal, but generous of spirit, willingly sharing the fruits of his labors with family, friends, and charitable causes.” He inspired through his example. He was patient, encouraging, kind, fair, and loyal. This is my favorite statement concerning Mr. Young: “We know that he is now with God who loves him even more than we do.”⁸

Being a Young Women leader, I identified with Betty Lee Taggart’s obituary. It said, “Through ... challenges [she] learned the virtues of industry and thrift, lessons that served her well throughout her life.” She married her husband in the temple, and together they raised 11 children. “Her family was her life’s work and joy.” Betty passed away one day before her 83rd birthday, surrounded by her family. I continue, “Mom was released the Sunday before her death as the secretary in her ward Young Women’s organization and was presented with her Young Womanhood Recognition Medallion the day before she died.”⁹

“I want to leave a legacy. How will they remember me?” Betty will be remembered as being resilient, hardworking, a noble mother, faithful, and as having endured to the end.

There are other commendations that at times bear a resemblance to the accolades listed in the obituaries. These tributes are found in our scriptures. Let me list just a few:

The brother of Jared was given a miraculous vision because of his great faith.¹⁰

Noah, Joseph, King Benjamin, and many other prophets were known as being just men.¹¹

David was a courageous boy. He became a mighty king, but he lost eternal blessings because he failed to keep God’s commandments and endure to the end.¹²

The prophet Ammaron recognized greatness in the young boy and future prophet Mormon, saying he was “a sober child, and ... quick to observe.”¹³

Naaman was “mighty ... in valour.”¹⁴

And Moroni was a strong and mighty man of perfect understanding.¹⁵

Ruth was greatly blessed and eventually married Boaz because “all the city ... doth know” that Ruth was a “virtuous woman.”¹⁶

A very noble expression of approval is found in D&C 124:20: “And again, verily I say unto you, my servant George Miller is without guile; he may be trusted because of the integrity of his heart; and for the love which he has to my testimony I, the Lord, love him.”

A singular tribute and honor was given to Abraham. Abraham is referred to by the Lord as being “my friend.”¹⁷

It was prophesied of Mary, the Savior’s mother, in 1 Nephi 11:15 that she was “a virgin, most beautiful and fair above all other[s].” Mary described herself as “the handmaid of the Lord.”¹⁸

There is no finer example of one who exemplified every noble attribute than our Savior, Jesus Christ, God’s Only Begotten Son in the flesh. He was known as the Good Samaritan, Advocate, Servant, Prince of Peace, Teacher, Life and Light of the World. We must do as the Primary song encourages: “Try, try to be like him, try, try, try.”¹⁹

How do we become so good? Will people ever write such words about us? In order to have such a legacy, we must be obedient in keeping all of God’s commandments. We must be teachable and practice moral discipline. As parents, we must live faithfully, as we are the constant examples to our children. Many times we must master the virtues of patience and long-suffering.

We must shun evil; repent; forget self and serve God, and by serving others show charity in all that we do; work; pray; be worthy of and respond to the promptings of the Holy Ghost; “feast upon the words of Christ,” because “the words of Christ will tell [us] all things what [we] should do.”²⁰

Some may say, “All of this is just too hard. It is impossible because of the wickedness of the world and our mortal condition.” Unfortunately, in weakness, the natural man may fall prey to the temptations of Satan. Satan is very real and wants us to be “miserable like unto himself.”²¹ We must choose to fortify ourselves. We are admonished to “be strong and of a good courage.”²²

I remember once lamenting to our son Alan, “Why can’t everyone just choose to be good?” He wisely responded, “Everyone isn’t the same, Mom. The true test comes when you make a mistake and you have to practice humility and then change. You have to have the courage to pick yourself up and repent.” One of the greatest prophets in the Book of Mormon was Alma the Younger. In a miraculous manner, he changed his legacy and how he would be remembered. He repented. He picked himself up and went forward in righteousness. After this mighty change of heart, he continually proclaimed the power of Jesus Christ, His love, His gospel, and the Savior’s atoning sacrifice for all mankind to all who would listen.

Why should we strive to be remembered for our righteous life? One reason is because we never know when we will leave mortality. “Joe” was not ready to leave this mortal existence. His obituary was written in first-person narrative and read, “On Friday evening I was driving to dinner with my wife and suddenly the plan was changed and I was called home against my wishes.” I felt a tinge of bitterness as I read these words. We do not control when we leave mortality. We must strive to live day by day in such a manner that we are prepared for this very real eventuality.

I’d like to close with one final obituary, experience, and lesson. On January 17, 2009, I opened my paper and there was the picture of a beautiful young girl. Her obituary reads: “Megan Sylvie Pysnak, 15, passed away ... after a skiing accident. ... Megan was nicknamed ‘Love,’ because she was full of charity.” She received her Young Womanhood Recognition award when she was 13 and was in the process of applying for a presidential scholarship at BYU because of her extraordinary achievements. It continued by listing many wonderful things.²³

I was so moved by what I read, I chose to attend her viewing and her funeral. I didn’t know Megan. And I was unprepared for what I saw, learned, and felt. Beautiful childhood pictures and remembrances were displayed. Also included were her Young Womanhood medallion and Megan’s ACT scores. I could understand how she could apply for BYU’s highest scholarship, even though she was only 15.

I was teary as I saw Megan’s little handmade case containing her temple recommend and her handwritten testimony. There was a poster with Megan’s picture and personalized comments written by her teenage friends. These are the sentiments I read: “She was an amazing spirit, she radiated light. She was talented and smart. She was sweet and happy. She was the nicest person.

She knew everything about the Book of Mormon. She had a spirit that words can't express. She always smiled at me. She was kind, truly a daughter of God. She was filled with love, and she raised everyone up by showing her love to all." One young man wrote, "I can imagine Megan, enclosed in Christ's arms, with Christ saying, 'Well done, my wise and faithful servant.'" Megan was prepared to return home to her Heavenly Father.

Reading and learning of a beautiful Mia Maid, Megan Sylvie Pysnak, in an eight-inch obituary, made me want to be better. And that is what this life is all about—becoming better, becoming more like our Savior, Jesus Christ.

I'm going to continue reading my obituaries, and I'm going to because I believe the truth and importance of the words of a simple song: "I want to leave a legacy. How will they remember me?"

May each of us live our life in such a way so as to be known as being tender, kind, refined, faithful, good, virtuous, and pure. In this way we will have demonstrated the choice to forgo being considered women of the world. We work diligently in mortality to leave as our personal legacy the remembrance that we are women of God. We are disciples of our Savior, Jesus Christ. May this be our constant desire and prayer, and I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

¹ Margaret D. Nadauld, in Conference Report, Oct. 2000, 16; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 15.

² Obituary of Helen Bailey Dyreng, *Deseret News*, July 7, 2010, B5.

³ Nichole Nordeman, "Legacy" (2002).

⁴ Obituary of Leland Heiner Wright Sr., *Deseret News*, Jan. 20, 2010, B6.

⁵ Obituary of Arthur R. Christensen, *Deseret News*, Jan. 20, 2010, B7.

⁶ Obituary of Alice Peel Hafen, *Deseret News*, Jan. 20, 2010, B7.

⁷ Obituary of Wanda Roberts, *Deseret News*, Apr. 6, 2005, B6.

⁸ Obituary of Robert Paul Young, *Deseret News*, Jan. 20, 2010, B6.

⁹ Obituary of Betty Lee Howell Taggart, *Deseret News*, Jan. 20, 2010, B6.

¹⁰ See Ether 12:20.

¹¹ See Moses 8:27; Alma 3:6; Omni 1:25.

¹² See Guide to the Scriptures, "David," scriptures.lds.org.

¹³ Mormon 1:2.

¹⁴ 2 Kings 5:1.

¹⁵ See Alma 48:11.

¹⁶ Ruth 3:11.

¹⁷ Isaiah 41:8.

¹⁸ See Luke 1:38.

¹⁹ "Jesus Once Was a Little Child," *Children's Songbook*, 55.

²⁰ 2 Nephi 32:3.

²¹ 2 Nephi 2:27.

²² Joshua 1:9.

²³ See obituary of Megan Sylvie Pysnak, *Deseret News*, Jan. 17, 2009, B5.