

Choose Ye This Day to Serve the Lord
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This address was given Thursday, April 29, 2010 at the BYU Women's Conference

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As I have thought about this meeting, I have had the Spirit confirm to me that this—like many other meetings that I have enjoyed while visiting South America, Central America, Mexico, and other parts of the world this past year, and that I have felt every time I meet with the sisters of the Church—is an emergency meeting and a training meeting, a time for us to learn. I feel a great urgency for the daughters of God to do all they need to do to strengthen and lift not only themselves, their families, sisters who are in their wards, but also the world. I feel that the sisters in this Church who know and understand their covenants will be a significant force in helping this world, which seems to have lost its moral moorings.

If the sisters who have made covenants with God know what they are supposed to do, that they are in for the long haul, and that they are in with all their faith, then this world will be okay and we will be all right. The theme of the conference is, “Say unto this people: Choose ye this day, to serve the Lord God who made you. Behold my Spirit is upon you, wherefore all thy words will I justify; and the mountains shall flee before you, and the rivers shall turn from their course; and thou shalt abide in me, and I in you; therefore walk with me.”¹ What a beautiful theme.

As we visit today I will cover three things. What it means to choose to serve the Lord, what that spirit is that is put upon us, and how we walk with the Lord. As I have contemplated what it means to choose to serve the Lord, I've thought of some of the last words my father spoke to me just a couple of weeks ago. He passed away about 10 days ago, and just before his passing we spent a quiet hour together. I had gone to visit him, and he was tired and didn't feel like talking, but as I was leaving, he called me back, and talked without stopping for almost an hour. He kept asking me over and over again, “What is your mission?” What is my mission? Why are we on earth? He reiterated that we are here to develop ourselves and build the kingdom of God. He said, “I have had an impression, and I think very deeply of the mission we have to serve before the Lord and how we have been called by the vision of prophets, and how the vision of the house of Israel is upon us.” He then reviewed the blessings of the families and the blessings we each have—the blessings of baptism, the Holy Ghost, the priesthood, the temple, of eternal life. He reiterated that there is a difference in what we choose to develop our lives to. Taking care of our posterity takes precedence over all other things. “Do you see the panorama of this family?” he said. “Think of the achievement of purpose our family has come to the earth to perform. A vision

of our family is the vision of our purpose before the Lord.” “What is your mission?” has rung in my ears for days.

I spent quite a few months this last winter studying about Rebekah from the Old Testament. I have been taken by her mission and what she had to do. I love Rebekah and I have learned so much from her. I feel that she is one of the women at the head of the house of Israel, and as my father spoke about the house of Israel, her life and mission was in my mind. I have loved studying her characteristics, her circumstances, her blessings, her journeys, her family, her experiences, and her challenges. She had a very full mortal experience. It had its highs and its lows. I have learned that she was one of the most pivotal and important people in the history of mankind, certainly in the house of Israel. Without a Rebekah, the house of Israel would not have been brought forth. Without a Rebekah who knew who she was, the house of Israel would not have been brought forth. Without a Rebekah who knew her responsibilities in the house of Israel, that house would not have come to pass. Without a Rebekah who knew how to receive revelation, the house of Israel would not have been brought forth. Without a Rebekah who understood the blessings of the priesthood, the house of Israel would not have been brought forth.

The lesson for me in all the hours and months of studying Rebekah and her family is that each of us in our day is as important to our generation and to our time as Rebekah was in her time. We each are pivotal in our families, and the success of the house of Israel is now dependent on millions of Rebekah's who understand what their place and mission is on the earth. Each of us is a daughter of heavenly parents, and as part of the house of Israel, we come from royal blood. When we choose our mission, we have power and influence in that royal house and in the Lord's work. He is depending on us.

I would like to ask now about the Lord's Spirit. What is that spirit that He puts on us that He has promised? That spirit is the power to know His will and to do His will. It is the power of personal revelation. We know that all righteous power in the universe comes from the Lord. It is His priesthood power that makes everything happen. All the universe, the planets, all the order that happens in this world and others comes about because of the priesthood power of God. He helps revelation happen in our lives. We share in that when we have that spirit. All the gifts and blessings of the priesthood are available to men and women alike. Those blessings such as the Holy Ghost, the priesthood covenants that we find in temples, and the spiritual gifts that are promised to every one of Heavenly Father's children are given for our benefit.²

All priesthood power has order, boundaries, and limits to its use. In our personal lives, we are only limited by our faithfulness and desire to receive the Lord's Spirit and to have it work in our lives. The Lord's power can be powerful.

I would suggest that each of us go to the temple and *pay attention*. Pay attention in the temple to what is happening, how things happen, the blessings that are given, who are they given by, and

the powers that come to you. Listen to the words of the temple ordinances and learn the powers that the Lord has given you through His priesthood. I have said before, "The ability to qualify for, receive, and act on personal revelation is the single most important ability that can be acquired in this life. Qualifying for the Lord's Spirit begins with a desire for that Spirit and implies a certain degree of worthiness. Keeping the commandments, repenting, and renewing covenants made at baptism lead to the blessing of always having the Lord's Spirit with us.³ When we have that spirit, we can walk with God. We can know His Son and make proper choices.

With the Lord's Spirit, weak and simple women can know what to do. I have been to places in the world where women aren't able to read. They haven't had the opportunity or have not been taught, but because of the Lord's power that is placed upon them, the covenants they have made in the temple, and His Spirit that is poured out upon them, they are powerful women. They can discern His will, solve major problems, and feel peace, comfort, and guidance in their lives. Education is wonderful, but being able to feel the Lord's power and Spirit upon us is the highest education we can achieve. With that, we have power and influence. Without it, we will not be able to navigate in this life. The adversary will pick us off one by one, and we will be drawn off course by the many, many voices that are out there distracting us. With the Lord's Spirit upon us, we are strong and solid and will be able to walk with Him.

Let us talk now about how we choose to walk with the Lord. First of all, we have to know what our responsibilities are and how to fulfill them. We know that, as women of God, this is a time when we need an increase of faith and personal righteousness. Never at any time in the world have we needed more faith from the women of God. By this I mean a faith of power as was taught by Joseph Smith. The kind of faith that creates miracles and calls down the powers of angels and heavenly help. That kind of increase of faith and personal righteousness will strengthen us. Never at any time in the history of the world have we needed stronger families and stronger homes. It is out of those homes and families that the next generation comes. As each of us walks out of our own home every day, how strong is that home that we are leaving? Is it a bastion of strength and power for us? There has never been a time when we have needed more seeking out and helping those in need. There are so many around us who are struggling because of the mischief caused by the adversary and the difficulties of mortal life. We know from reading in the scriptures that even the best of the best of the Lord's favored people will not escape mortal life. We will have experiences that test us and try us, and it is the network of help that we provide for each other that strengthens us. These are individual responsibilities, and they are also group responsibilities of the worldwide Relief Society.

We understand the power of a group working in faith, strengthening homes, and seeking out to help one another. One of my favorite stories in scripture is the story of the Lamanite mothers in the Book of Mormon. The real power of that story was their unity. It was brought to my attention once that we don't know the names of those 2060 mothers and we don't need to. The important thing is that every single one of them had the same strong faith. There wasn't one mother in that

2060 who was weak in her faith. It was the combination of the support they provided for each other and the help they gave to each other that made their homes unitedly powerful. That is what we provide for each other as sisters and daughters of God in the Lord's work.

I have said lately that women are like lionesses at the gate of the home. Whatever happens in that home and family happens because she cares about it and it matters to her. She guards that gate, and things matter to that family if they matter to her. For example, if the lioness at the gate believes in the law of tithing, tithing will be paid in that family. If that family has a humble little portion of ten pesos coming in, that lioness will safeguard the one peso if tithing is important to her. If that lioness at the gate knows about renewing her baptismal covenants with God, she will be in sacrament meeting on Sunday, and she will prepare her children to be there. They will be washed, cleaned, combed, and taught about that meeting and what happens there. It isn't a casual event, but it is serious to her, and it will be serious to them. The lioness at the gate ensures that temple worship is taken care of in the family. She encourages that participation. She cares about seeking after her ancestors. If the lioness at the gate knows about and understands missions, missionaries, and the mission of the house of Israel, she will prepare future missionaries to go out from that home. It is very difficult to get a lion cub away from a lioness who doesn't believe in missions, but if the lioness believes in a mission, she will devote her life to preparing the cub to go out and serve the Lord. That's how important she is. Service happens if she cares about it.

Sisters, you are each like the lioness at the gate. This means that there has to be some prioritizing. I was taught years ago that when our priorities are out of order, we lose power. If we need power and influence to carry out our mission, then our priorities have to be straight.

Years ago I began using a system that works for me, and maybe it will work for you. There was a time when I needed to prioritize, and in one of those sacred meetings between me and the Lord, He gave me three categories that I have worked from, and they have been a guide in my life. The categories are the essential things, the necessary things, and the nice-to-do things. I started writing those things down. I asked, "What has to go in the category of essential?" What things must be taken care of, and if I don't take care of them, the blessings of eternal life won't be mine nor will they be my family's.

I wrote at the top of the essential list *revelation*. I have to be able to know the mind and will of God. Therefore, I have to do the things in my life that put me in a position to hear His voice. Reading the scriptures then became an essential for me because the scriptures contain the mind and will of God, and by reading and studying from them, I can hear His voice and receive His guidance in all aspects of my life. I came up with a simple rule that was easy for me to keep: Every day I will spend some time in the scriptures. The accumulative power and learning of that commitment has changed my life and helped me learn daily the mind and will of God.

Personal prayer took on new meaning when I knew that I needed to know the mind and will of God. I have taken a paper and pencil with me most of the time since then to my prayers. I don't

always receive an answer or instruction, but I am ready. I want to be ready to learn what the Lord would have me do in my day. Who needs my help? How can I increase my faith this day? How can I strengthen my family? What things do I need to correct in order to be worthy to receive His Spirit? He will tell me.

Taking time to ponder and fast with sincerity took on added meaning when I knew that revelation was an essential for me. Making covenants and keeping covenants is on the essential list. Going to sacrament meeting and repenting every week took on added meaning. Going to the temple and fulfilling that responsibility frequently became an essential. Sharing the gospel is something the Lord tells us is an essential, and we are charged as part of the house of Israel to share that message. I need to open my mouth and find ways to share and express my testimony. Service took on added meaning. The Lord said if you want eternal life, give all that you have and follow me.⁴ So those things went on my essentials list. The list wasn't very long, but there were essential things that I could see to and make sure that they were taken care of.

On my necessary list, then, went some other things. I started thinking about my home and family and what was necessary to create an environment or climate where the Spirit of the Lord would be. There were some necessary things to take care of. Homemaking took on a new meaning for me. I wanted to make a home where the Spirit of the Lord was present. That meant that even mundane tasks like picking things up and cleaning, became necessary to keep a house of order. I wanted to model my house after the temple. Though that is the ideal, it has never been that perfect. We have to live there after all. A house is peopled with people. People make messes, and we can't be little soldiers, but it made a difference to me to know that I wanted a house of order. It became a priority to make a place where the Spirit of the Lord could come.

Cooking meals for my family took on added meaning because I needed a place to teach and gather and have the Lord's Spirit there. It was important to invest my effort in making a home.

At one time I was going through some challenges, and one of my daughters came home from school and put another item on my necessary list. I said, "I don't feel like I'm contributing what I should or what I could," and she said, "You could smile. Mother, you could smile." I thought, "That is a great service." Smiling took on added meaning for me. Being happy around my family and other people was necessary.

I learned some things from the scriptures—that it is necessary to teach my children to pray and walk uprightly before the Lord. Things like family home evening and time recreating with our family became more necessary and more important. I thought more about my husband and supporting him, and I studied Doctrine and Covenants section 25, in which the Lord tells Emma Smith to be a comfort to her husband with consoling words and a spirit of meekness.⁵ That took on more importance, and it was more necessary to me to be kind to my husband and to support him in his heavy responsibilities. I also learned from that section in verse 10 to "lay aside the

things of [the] world, and seek for the things of a better,” to not ask him to provide things for me we couldn't afford but value the things that were important for our family—to “seek for the things of a better” and not be tantalized by “the things of the world” that were glamorous. Becoming self-reliant became more important to me.

I have been reviewing Elder Hales's words in his talk on provident living and self-reliance about debt.⁶ When we go into debt, we give away some of our precious, priceless agency and place ourselves in self-imposed servitude. As our freedom is diminished by debt, increasing hopelessness depletes us physically, depresses us mentally, burdens us spiritually. Our self-image is affected, as well as our relationships with our spouse and children, with our friends and neighbors, and ultimately with the Lord.

Becoming self-reliant temporally affects our spiritual self-reliance, and we are going to need to be more temporally self-reliant in the days to come in order to have strong spirits and help the Lord.

Loving one another goes on the necessary list and a few other things. You can make your own list of what is necessary, but there are things that are essential and things that are necessary in order for us to fulfill our responsibilities in the house of Israel and to fulfill our mission.

The third category has to do with the nice-to-do things. Those are crafts and hobbies and recreational reading and movies and travel and lunches with friends. A lot of women call this “time out.” These things won't save us. They add variety to our lives, but they won't save us. When our priorities are on that list, and our time is devoted to those nice-to-do things, our priorities are out of order, and we lose power.

To walk with the Lord, we have to know what is essential, what is necessary, and what is nice to do. There is a lot to do, but I find that it is amazing how much I get to do on my nice-to-do list. The Lord blesses us with those mercies, but only if the other priorities are in order.

In order to prioritize time wisely, I learned something from my father-in-law years ago. He was a steel-worker and spent his life working three different shifts. He either worked the day shift, the afternoon shift, or the night shift. As a young mother I realized one time that I was working all three shifts, and that's why I was so tired. We can't do all things all at once, and we have to be careful and safeguard our shifts.

As I have talked to young mothers and mothers with children at home—those with teenagers and young adults especially—they tell me that their most important shift to be at the top of their game, to be the strongest lioness at the gate is the “swing shift.” That's the afternoon shift. That's when everyone comes home hungry, tired, needy, and less lovable. It is when you are hungry, tired, needy, and less loveable. It is also the time of day when people are more teachable, when they are most grateful. When we realize and prioritize our time properly, we don't expect to use

all of our strength on the other two shifts so that the afternoon shift can be safeguarded and can be a time of strength and power. We plan for times when the meals are there together, when we can create that home environment and when that family can gather, and you are the strengthening power and force in that family. Remember that influence and power come when we prioritize correctly. If you spend time elsewhere, you don't have it to give. For other women it might be another time of the day. Some of us have to be on call during the day shift. There are many who need help during the day. Service is needed during the day, but look at and evaluate your life. Ask "Where do I need to prioritize my time?" and "When do I have to be at the top of my game?" I have learned that a good woman with the help of the Lord can usually work two to two and a half shifts. However, no one can work all three shifts. You have to prioritize where you are going to spend your energy.

Is there any instruction in this for the single sisters of the Church? Is life on hold for you? How can you fulfill your mission? I think of the verse in Doctrine and Covenants 84:106, in which the Lord commands that those that are strong take with them those that are weak. I believe that the single sisters of the Church are one of our strongest, most powerful forces of the Lord's army in the world, and He needs the help of the single sisters to help "lift up the hands [that] hang down."⁷ Those who have children are being assaulted, and their children are being assaulted, and they need encouragement. They need that unified strength that the Lamanite mothers had. You have, single sisters, real work to do—with and for real people. You have been placed in a ward family.

Oftentimes I hear single sisters talk about being in a "singles" ward or a "family" ward. Wards were not organized to be single or family. You are placed in a ward family to be part of strengthening that family.

If you read in Alma 48, a time of battle and war, there were three strategies brought about by Moroni, and one strategy was preparing the minds of the people to be faithful to the Lord their God. You can do that. You help in a million ways in your ward and earthly family. You help people to be faithful. The second strategy was providing places of refuge in small forts. Your ward is a place of refuge for every person in that ward. Your strength will help strengthen the ward. The third strategy was placing the greatest amount of help where the most help was needed. That's the work the single sisters do. I would hope that each of you would ask yourself, "What is my mission?"

As I spoke with my father, he had something else to say. He said, "The Saints of God are committed to wear out their lives in carrying the gospel to all the world to strengthen those who falter, to bring forth the blessings of salvation to those who have passed beyond without the blessings of the priesthood." This does not have to be complicated.

Not long ago, I was given a little afghan by a friend of mine. It was made by her mother, who is in her late 90s, Alba Gardner. This afghan is made up of a number of smaller squares. My friend

said her mother told her, "I'm too old to do anything for anyone." She used to make afghans, but she said that it's too much of a project now. She said, "Well then, Mother, just make a little square." So Alba started with one little square, and then she made another little square and another little square. Little by little, her daughter pieced them together for her. Then she could give something to the humanitarian center. She has made many gifts like this for others in need by taking care of one square at a time and having someone help her piece them together. That's how we do this.

In the Church we have this marvelous program called visiting teaching. I don't know if I can bear a strong enough testimony about the power of visiting teaching. It is for every woman. It isn't a worn-out way of doing things. It is going to be the thing, the one thing that will save us in times to come.

Visiting teachers are first responders. There are no EMT's in the world who can equal a visiting teacher and the power she has to help. Just this past week I have felt that power and help as my visiting teachers and other friends have come to my rescue knowing intuitively things I needed. Yesterday, when I couldn't locate my mother, I finally got her to answer her phone. She was at the doctor's office. Who took her there? She was there with her visiting teacher. Those are the kinds of helpful things that make us powerful.

We are part of a *Relief Society* that has been organized after the pattern and manner of the priesthood. Its purpose is parallel with priesthood purpose. Its work is similar to the work of quorums. Young women prepare their whole lives to enter this opportunity of service and leadership in the Lord's kingdom. As a daughter in the house of Israel, they can now be called upon to serve in any capacity and in any place in His kingdom.

Relief Society strengthens the identity of a woman of God. This gives her power and influence in the Lord's work. Sisters, it is important for us to know who we are, and being part of this Relief Society gives us the opportunity to be organized, taught, and inspired consistent with who we are.

I have a little exercise for those of you who want something specific to do in your scripture study. Get a new little copy of the Book of Mormon. In the front of it, open to a blank page and write three questions: Who am I? What are my responsibilities in the house of Israel? How do I fulfill my responsibilities? As you read and study, you will find some blank pages in the back. You can add Post-it notes if you like. Start writing your answers in the back as you read, and you will have a journey of discovery about who you are. It doesn't matter how long this study takes. Take one month, take ten years, and discover who you are. When you finish studying those questions in the Book of Mormon, study them in the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and the Old Testament. The Lord knows who you are. He knows what your responsibilities are and how you can fulfill them. Power and strength will come to you as you understand who you are in the Lord's kingdom.

In this brief emergency meeting, we have talked about being a Rebekah in your own generation. If that one woman, that one Rebekah had failed in any part of her responsibility, how would the house of Israel have come forth? She understood and knew her importance, and she never lived to see the outcome of her commitment. Those blessings are just now beginning to unfold after these many thousands of generations, but her blessings are happening in the world. I can see the house of Israel being gathered up, the temples being built. That is what she invested her life for.

We have talked about being the lioness at the gate and how important it is to safeguard that home, that family, to have that kind of power. We discussed that nothing really powerful happens in a home or a family if the lioness doesn't care about it or invest in it. To move the Lord's work forward, we have to have a powerful faith, a strong faith. We need stronger families and homes and we are to seek out and help those who are in need.

We know that when our priorities are out of order, we lose power. It takes personal revelation every day to help us prioritize and reprioritize and keep at bay the influences of the world that would draw us from what we are to do.

In Doctrine and Covenants 133:57-59 it says this:

“And for this cause, that men might be made partakers of the glories which were to be revealed, the Lord sent forth the fulness of his gospel, his everlasting covenant, reasoning in plainness and simplicity—

“To prepare the weak for those things which are coming on the earth, and for the Lord's errand in the day when the weak shall confound the wise, and the little one become a strong nation, and two shall put their tens of thousands to flight.

“And by the weak things of the earth the Lord shall thrash the nations by the power of his Spirit.”

Sisters, we know that if we choose to serve the Lord, His Spirit will be put upon us, that he will abide in us, and that He will walk with us and we will walk with Him.

I bear you my testimony of the truth of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, that Joseph Smith did, in very deed, go into a grove of trees and ask the supreme question of His Heavenly Father, and that God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, appeared to Joseph Smith and gave him instructions and helped prepare him to be a prophet of God, who organized their work upon the earth in this day. Through him the priesthood power was restored to the earth and every key and blessing and ordinance that we need to return to our heavenly home was provided for us. Temples were established and the Lord's work commenced throughout the world. The house of Israel began to be gathered up. Everything that matters to us today should matter because of that event. Joseph Smith learned who our Father in Heaven was and His Son, Jesus Christ, and Their

mission. Out of that he learned who he was and, consequently, who we are and what the Lord's work on the earth is. That work continues today under the direction of a prophet of God, President Thomas S. Monson, who knows and has the Lord's will revealed to him. He is leading the way, teaching us. I would pray that we follow his example and his words.

It is our privilege to be part of the house of Israel. The daughters in that house are equipped with the blessings and power of the priesthood to go forth and do a marvelous work and a wonder in this day and age.

I have great faith and trust and confidence that Heavenly Father's daughters will learn and recognize who they are, that they will know their mission on the earth and fulfill that. I leave my great love and testimony with you in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

¹ Moses 6:33-34.

² See Doctrine and Covenants 46.

³ Julie B. Beck, "And upon the Handmaids in Those Days Will I Pour out My Spirit", *Ensign*, May 2010.

⁴ See Matthew 16:24.

⁵ Doctrine and Covenants 25:5.

⁶ See "Becoming Provident Providers Temporally and Spiritually," *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2009, 7-10.

⁷ Doctrine and Covenants 81:5.