

For Such a Time as This

Wendy Watson Nelson

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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>

Our theme for this year's women's conference is one with which we are all familiar. You know the story. And you know the statement: "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14). It is from the life of Queen Esther, who, at great peril to herself, stepped forward in a most crucial way to save her people. She was the right person, at the right place, at the right time, with the right preparation to do what the Lord needed her to do.

Sisters, *we* are here in mortality now, because we're supposed to be here, now! The doctrine is clear on this point. And among those things we are to do while we're here on earth is to complete the mortal assignments we were given premortally and to which we agreed. The Savior said that He came to earth to do the will of His Father who sent Him. In like manner, we are here to do the will of our Father, that same Father, who sent us.

President George Q. Cannon said it this way:

"God has chosen us out of the world and has given us a great mission. I do not entertain a doubt myself but that we were selected for the mission before the world was, that we had our parts allotted to us in this mortal state of existence, as our Savior had His assigned to Him!"¹

The great mission to which President Cannon was referring was the charge to build up the latter-day kingdom of God on earth, by taking the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. Note that he said every one of us had our parts allotted to us.

In order to fulfill the wonderful mission for which we were sent to earth, we need to be prepared! I love the words of the angel Gabriel when he came to Daniel in an hour of great need:

"O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding" (Daniel 9:22).

A few months prior to my marriage, I had an experience which illustrated, in a dramatic fashion, just how vital it is that we are prepared with the skill and understanding necessary to do what the Lord needs us to do. On the first weekend of November 2005, I accompanied my dear friend Sheri Dew to Palmyra, New York, where we participated in a symposium on the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Because our obligations lasted into Saturday evening, and in order to be home in time to meet our Sunday commitments, we were booked on two early-morning Sunday flights from Rochester to Cincinnati and from Cincinnati to Salt Lake City. As a result, we pulled into the Rochester airport at 4:30 a.m. We were walking towards the terminal, when suddenly—unexplainably—I tripped and fell and did what could only be described as a cartoon face-plant, right into the cement!

Sheri, who was walking ahead of me, heard my thud, turned around, and saw me face down on the pavement, which was quickly turning red from the blood pouring from a large gash in my forehead and nose. She helped me to a sitting position on the sidewalk and we dug through our bags looking for something to slow the bleeding. We couldn't find anything and began to look for someone to help us. There were three police cars parked only a few feet away, but not a policeman to be found. And it was so early in the morning that there was not one other person in sight.

I instantly knew what had to be done. I said to Sheri, "You've got to pray for me." Without hesitating, she knelt down on the pavement next to me and began to plead with the Lord. The only way I can describe that prayer is to say that she prayed with power. She petitioned the Lord to stop my fear, to stop the bleeding, to stop the pain. And she pleaded that she would know what to do to take care of me.

My fear stopped instantly! The bleeding slowed dramatically. And the pain stopped too.

The Lord honored Sheri's prayer of faith. I did, however, still have a hole in my face, which desperately needed medical attention. While I sat on the curb, Sheri darted off in search of help, finally finding, and persuading, an ornery cabby to call the police. A few minutes later, an officer arrived, took one look at me, and called the paramedics. About five minutes later, a fire truck, with sirens blaring, and an EMT truck, filled with paramedics clad in silver fire suits, arrived.

There must have been several million dollars worth of equipment lined up and years of emergency and medical assistance available to help us. But with all due respect to these professionals, on that morning it felt as though we were dealing with Dumb and Dumber! They did *not* have the skill and understanding to help me. In fact, they couldn't quite figure out how to open up the bandages. Looking back, I wonder if their clumsiness was a response to the horrifying sight of my injury.

As they fumbled with the bandages, the EMT asked if I wanted to be transported to the emergency room. Sheri instantly intervened: "No, I'm taking her home." With a flimsy bandage finally applied so that I would not scare the other passengers, I walked with Sheri's help through the airport. Once at our gate, she found a store that had basic first aid supplies. My first clue about the size of the wound occurred when she applied the Neosporin. Instead of dabbing it on the wound, she squeezed it into the hole, much like you would squeeze icing onto a cake! Just how *big was* that hole? I'll never know, because she never let me see the wound.

With the injury finally protected by a bandage that covered most of my forehead and nose, I was feeling fine, and I settled back into my seat on the plane. There was no fear, no pain, no bleeding. As the plane took off, I mentioned that I had an appointment later that week with a dermatologist and perhaps I should have him take a look at the injury.

Sheri's response was careful: "Oh," she said, "you know, after all you've been through this morning you're probably not going to feel much like going to church today. When we get to Cincinnati, why

don't we call ahead and see if we can find a surgeon, a *plastic* surgeon, in Salt Lake who will see you, today? We might as well take care of this as soon as we arrive home."

She said all of this very matter-of-factly. I still had no idea just how serious my circumstance was. We did as Sheri suggested, and upon landing in Salt Lake City we learned that we were to go immediately to LDS Hospital, where a superb plastic surgeon was waiting.

As he took off my bandage, his expression told the story: "Oh, yes," he said, "it's a good thing you called me today. It looks as though you left a pound of flesh on that New York sidewalk!" An hour later, I was in surgery, where it took countless stitches (the surgeon guessed that there were well over 300) to put my face back together. However, the surgery did not take place until after, at the instigation of Sheri, I received a priesthood blessing.

After hearing about my accident, a friend, an experienced nurse, said, "Sheri was the right person to be with you, Wendy. I might have held up my compact mirror and said, 'Just look at this hole in your face! Notice how well exposed the nasal bone is!' But Sheri was right to never let you see it."

There were several reasons Sheri was the right person to be with me. In the very moment, at 4:30 a.m. on a dirty airport sidewalk, she had the spiritual skill and understanding to know how to petition the Father, with power, in the name of the Son, so that the pain would stop, the fear would stop, and the bleeding would stop. And then, she knew how to hear the voice of the Lord and His directions through the Spirit to get me from the airport sidewalk to the surgical suite.

I have often wondered how differently the story may have unfolded had Sheri not been with me.

- What if I'd been with someone who didn't know how to draw upon the powers of heaven.
- What if I'd been with someone who'd said: "Wendy, I'll pray, but I've been meaning to repent of some things to increase my purity"; or "I've been meaning to spend more time in the scriptures so that I can learn to hear the voice of the Lord, through the word of the Lord"; or "I've been meaning to spend more time in the temple so I can better understand the kind of power with which I've been endowed"; or "I've been meaning to seek more diligently, *but* I've been so busy with so many other things—good things, but not things of the Spirit! So, I'm sorry Wendy. Let's say a little prayer and see if we can get the paramedics here."

I shudder to think what might have happened that morning if I had only been able to trust in the arm of flesh, especially when so much of mine was lying on that airport sidewalk! But I don't need to shudder. I just need to be grateful that Sheri was with me. She *was* the right person.

Let me tell you three accounts of other women who were in the right place, at the right time, with the right skills and understanding.

The first story:

After much time and diligent effort to help a struggling missionary, a mission president was on the verge of sending the elder home. The mission president's wife came to her husband one day and said, "I don't feel quite right about this. Are you sure this young elder should go home? I've watched him. I've looked into his face, and this is a good young man." This visionary woman

entreated her husband to reconsider his decision, which he did, and the elder stayed. And the outcome? The young elder served not only his full time in the mission field, not only a worthy mission—he served a splendid mission for the Lord. The mission president’s wife was the right person, in the right place, at the right time, with the right skill and understanding to see beyond the surface. She had eyes to see the young elder’s true self!

Story number two:

A young woman prayed every night of her marriage that she would be protected from her husband’s abuse. Her husband was under the influence of pornography and other evil practices, such as lying and oppression, and he perpetrated sexual and emotional and mental abuse upon her, from their wedding night forward. Because he looked the part of a “good Latter-day Saint man,” only her mother and one friend believed her when she finally reached out for help. The Spirit confirmed for each woman that something was not quite right with the young woman’s situation.

Let me pause here to say that I learned as a marriage and family therapist that when a woman says there is something not quite right, there is something really wrong.

In any event, these three women—the young woman, her mother, and her friend—learned to pray with power, to access protection and direction from the Lord. The young woman was miraculously protected from any further abuse. Many times she experienced her husband being stopped in his angry, accusing, mistreating tracks by what seemed to be unseen arms. Her mother and her friend were the right people, in the right place, at the right time, with the right skill and understanding to save her.

Story number three is actually a volume of experiences of women with whom I have spoken who have found their son or their daughter through adoption—Fascinating against-all-odds stories of overcoming government red tape, huge fees, an illness of the child. In every case, these women—mothers who would never give up—knew through promptings of the Spirit that there was another child who was theirs. And nothing could stop them. Like Pharaoh’s daughter who found Moses in the bulrushes, these mothers were at the right place, at the right time, with the right skills and understanding, to find their children and bring them home.

Each of these accounts of faithful women prompts a simple but crucial question for you and me to consider. And the question is: How do you and I acquire spiritual skills and understanding so that *we* can be in the right place, at the right time, with the right preparation to do whatever the Lord needs us to do, including all we promised premortally to do?

For a decade I’ve watched Sheri driven to her knees, to the scriptures, and to the temple as she has faced one overwhelming assignment and disappointment after another. On that early November morning, I was the grateful recipient of the spiritual skill and understanding it has taken her years to acquire.

May I suggest that some of the most heart-wrenching, discouraging events in our lives—from which we long to be set free—are actually designed to prepare us with the very skills and understanding the Lord needs us to have. As we draw closer to the Lord and put our total trust in Him, in His power, and in His timing, we can leave our fires of affliction more pure, more refined, and with more skills and understanding, instead of leaving having been burnt to a crisp!

Elder Neal A. Maxwell spoke of our personal challenges this way:

“Unless we are filled with resolve, what will we say to the heroes and heroines of Martin’s Cove and the Sweetwater? That ‘we admire you, but we are reluctant to wade through our own rivers of chilling adversity?’ By divine appointment, these are our days. Moreover, though we live in a failing world, we have not been sent here to fail!”²

It is simply inconceivable that our Father would have selected us for our day, the latter part of the latter days, if He didn’t have confidence that we could overcome the world and fulfill the wonderful missions for which we were sent to earth.

In 1979 President Spencer W. Kimball prophesied about our mission as the women of these last days. Many of us can repeat from memory President Kimball’s prophecy:

“Much of the major growth that is coming to the Church in the last days will come because many of the good women of the world (in whom there is often such an inner sense of spirituality) will be drawn to the Church in large numbers. This will happen to the degree that the women of the Church reflect righteousness and articulateness in their lives, and to the degree that [they] are seen as distinct and different, in happy ways, from the women of the world.”³

Sisters, what are we doing to become more righteous and articulate? What are we doing to show that we are different, in happy ways, from the women of the world, such that they would be drawn to us rather than annoyed by us?

And one more question: Do *you* feel a growing urgency to do all that the Lord requires of you, so that you can fulfill your life mission? Every woman here was commissioned to do something, and probably many “somethings,” for the Lord.

I think of a great woman—a wife, mother, and grandmother—who has recently been focused on gaining a better understanding of her life’s mission. This past Christmas she called and said, “I did all the right things. We had wonderful food and scripture readings. The children performed the nativity. We sang carols and took pictures. We celebrated the Savior’s birth as a family and had a marvelous time being together. But now that Christmas is over, I’m looking for more meaning in my life.” What a spiritually in-tune woman! The Spirit is moving upon her spirit and letting her know that there is yet more to her mission on earth. She is like a thoroughbred ready to run.. She wants to do all that she was born to do—all that she agreed premortally to do here in mortality.

Even though she is doing all kinds of “right things,” her spirit can tell there is something more, or something different, she needs to be doing. As she has thought about it, she knows that missionary work has always stirred her soul. Could it be that she and her gifts for searching out missionary moments and for preaching the gospel with simplicity and power were brought to the kingdom for such a time as this?

Congratulate yourself if you are in a situation similar to my friend, looking for more meaning in your life. It may mean that your spirit is restless and knows that you were indeed born to do something different, or more, than you are presently doing. If you feel a little unsettled these days, the problem may be that you are not yet doing what you came here to do. Does it mean that you need to make a dramatic change? It may, but it may not.

Just the other day I had an unexpected conversation with a friend who has felt very restless and underused. She is a faithful, multitalented, capable woman, and yet she said, almost in despair, “I wonder if I even have a mission!” Later, she poured her heart out to the Lord, just as she has relentlessly been doing for months. However, this time she listened in a different way and received a little “corrective feedback” from the Lord. She had been looking for her mission somewhere other than the situation in which He has presently placed her. Through the whisperings of the Spirit, her mind was enlarged and her heart changed. She was flooded with ideas, ideas confirming that she was in exactly the right place for what the Lord needs her to do. No one was more surprised than she.

President Joseph F. Smith taught this about our missions on earth:

“He that sent His Only Begotten Son into the world to accomplish the mission which he did, also sent every soul within the sound of my voice, and indeed every man and woman in the world, to accomplish a mission, and that mission cannot be accomplished by neglect; nor by indifference; nor can it be accomplished in ignorance. We must learn our duty; learn the requirements that the Lord has made at our hands, and understand the responsibilities that he has placed upon us.”⁴

President Smith’s statement begs the question for each of us: Why are you here on earth at this particular time? For example, have you been asked to shepherd strong-willed spirits and build them into talented, faithful men and women? Have you been asked to learn to distinguish good from evil and to bravely speak up against practices which support the adversary’s agenda? Or have you been asked to sacrifice in a particular way for the mission of another? Or have you been sent to live in a troubled family situation in order to increase the purity in that lineage by putting a stop, once and for all, to various impurities? Or have you been sent to teach with clarity and charity eternal truths which will help the women of the world and their families?

What is *your* part in helping the Savior with His mission, which is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man? (see Moses 1:39).

Sisters, we were indeed born for such a time as this. We came trailing abilities and assignments from our premortal existence. And the truth about finding our mission is this: Because we love the Lord and have faith in Him, we *want* to be obedient to Him. We want to do whatever He asks us to do. We are willing and happy to be, as Paul described himself, “a prisoner of Jesus Christ” (Philem. 1:1). It is our obedience to the Lord that positions us to fill the measure of our creation. The more obedient we are to Him, the more we grow into our true selves, and the more we are able to do what we came here to do. Increasingly impeccable obedience is key to finding our missions.

And consecration is key to fulfilling our missions once we’ve found them! The only way I know to do what we’ve come here to do, to live up to who we are and to worthily fulfill our premortal commitments, is to consecrate all that we have, and all that we are, to the Lord. That means putting Him and His work first. That means developing our gifts and talents to build up His kingdom rather than our own. That means giving Him even our will.

What do you think would happen if we were to look at every ability and every talent, every challenge and grueling obstacle, as being given to us “for such a time as this”? Every gift and endowment from above—every opportunity, heartache, and disappointment here—teaches us,

enlightens us, and makes us who we are: women better prepared to serve the Lord, however and whenever He calls.

And what happens when the only desire of our heart is to give all that we have and are back to the Lord? When we want to consecrate every gift, talent, and resource? When we want to consecrate every relationship unto Him? What happens? Marvelous things—life-changing and spirit-enlarging things.

For example, Do you have a musical talent? What happens to your practicing and performances when you give that talent back to the Lord? Do you have an ability to make something out of nothing; or to teach with clarity; or to bring family history to life with stories, pictures, and music; or to make people feel welcomed and included; or to have compassion for others; or to be a peacemaker? What comes to your mind and heart about what you want to do more of, or less of, when you really think about consecrating those abilities to the Lord for His use and to build up His kingdom? When you consecrate a relationship to the Lord, what happens to your ability to give and receive love, to be patient, to put contention aside, to give the other the benefit of the doubt?

In short, what changes when you think about doing *everything* you do, *truly* devoting your life, for the building up of the Lord's kingdom?

Now, if you've been tempted to second-guess the Lord with thoughts such as, "Well, the Lord would never use me to do anything significant for His kingdom. I don't have what it takes to move His work ahead," please consider the following truth as taught by Elder Russell M. Nelson: "The Lord uses the unlikely to accomplish the impossible."⁵

If you feel like the most unlikely person to be asked to accomplish something that looks utterly impossible, look out! Consider the Prophet Joseph Smith, who described himself as "an obscure boy . . . of no consequence" (JS—H 1:22), or Elizabeth, who was far beyond childbearing age yet gave birth to John, the forerunner of the Savior (see Luke 1:5–25, 57–80).

What were *you* designated premortally to do while you are here on earth?

Can you imagine what would happen if a popular talk show host suddenly declared that he or she had discovered that there was a premortal existence? That we had received certain assignments there, which we were to complete here on earth? And that one of the major purposes of life was to find and fulfill those assignments? How excited would the women of the world be? How quickly would a major marketing blitz be launched encouraging women to find their true purpose in life, with nothing being more important than bearing, and bearing with, children!

Can you imagine the campaign to urge women not to spend one more minute on anything that didn't move them toward finding their missions? Can you imagine the television shows that might spring up showing women's efforts and successes? What would the slogans on T-shirts, mugs, posters, bumper stickers, and pop-ups on the Internet say in order to encourage women to stop whatever they were doing, however important or urgent they thought it was, and go steadily forward with faith to find their missions, even their commissions, from our *Father in Heaven*?

What would the world do if it believed what we know to be true? But the world hasn't embraced these truths, and never will! That is what makes our quest, to live as covenant women of God, all the more complicated and adventurous! Because if we are following the Lord, we will feel

increasingly out of step with the world. In fact, perhaps an early clue that there is something not quite right in our lives is if we are feeling a little *too* comfortable with the world, if we are looking and acting a little too much like the women of the world.

The Lord knows us. He loves us. He believes in us. And He is counting on us to do exactly what we said we would do. Happily, we don't have to do it alone. He stands waiting for us to seek His help. He is eager to endow those who qualify with His power. He will gift us with skill and understanding commensurate with our seeking, our purity, and our need.

Sisters, we are part of a royal army of women, sent here to gather the good women of the earth and welcome them into the Lord's kingdom. Indeed, "we have a labor to perform [now] whilst in this tabernacle of clay, that we may conquer the enemy of all righteousness" (Moro. 9:6).

I love the words of the ninth article of faith and "for such a time as this" I hear those truths this way:

"We believe all that God has revealed [regarding our mission as His daughters in these last day of the latter-days], all that He does now reveal [regarding our mission as His covenant women upon the earth], and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to [our role as latter-day women of God in building up] the Kingdom of God."