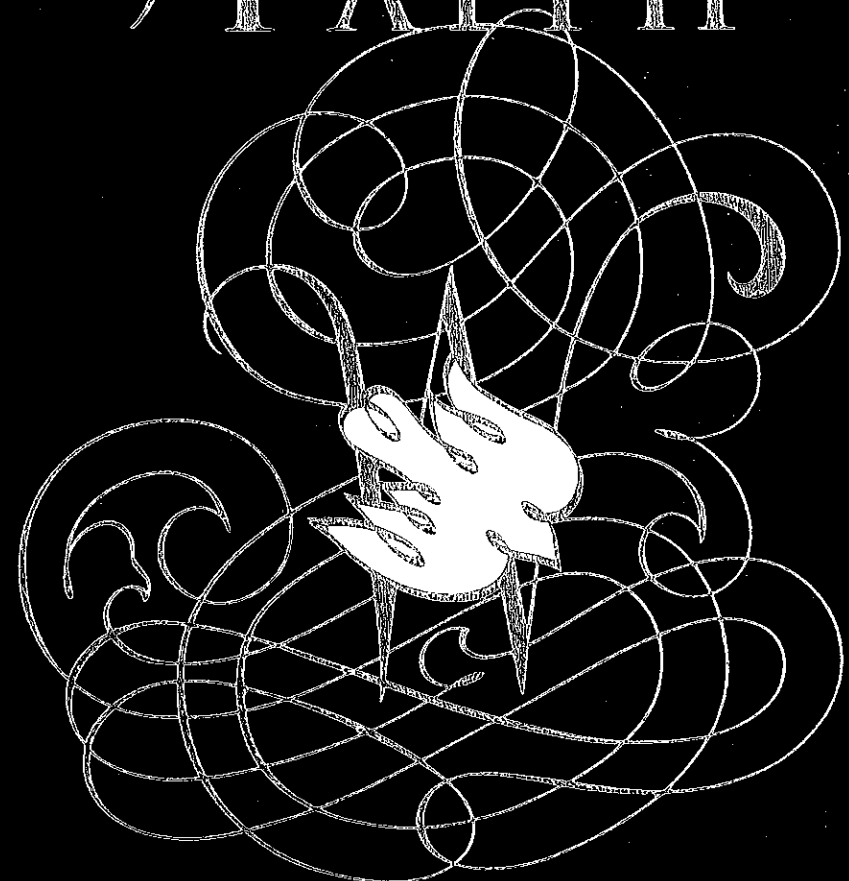


WOMEN *of* FAITH



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W O M E N
of F A I T H

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One evening, not long ago, my wife, Colleen, said to me, “You really ought to go see Pearl Lence; it is her birthday.” Earlier I had been Pearl’s home teacher for a few years. Pearl was by then over ninety. But it had been a long, hard day, and I said, “Oh, honey, I am just so tired.” Colleen said, “I think you ought to go.” So I went.

Pearl came to the doorway after I rang the bell. When she opened it and saw who it was, she said, “I prayed to Heavenly Father that you would come today, and the Spirit told me you would come.”

I am grateful such promptings come. I don’t worry about which of us they come through, my wife or me, as we strive to serve in the kingdom of God. I regularly watch Colleen in the circle of her ministry which is wide and deep as she moves about her rounds quietly. It is not uncommon for me to be starting a meal and find that she is fasting—sometimes for someone I hardly know who is ill or has a sick wife or for whomever. I am not offended but happy when she gets the promptings that come to us in our mutual roles as neighbors and parents.

If I fail otherwise in these thoughts, I desire to salute and to encourage the faithful women of the Church. Previously, I have paid public and deserved tribute, describing them as “the women of God.” Happily, their numbers increase, for there has been, and is now taking place, by both birth and conversion, a significant infusion of such sisters into the kingdom. These saintly sisters have been sent by God to share in performing significant tasks, which I will reference later.

Unquestionably, as brothers and sisters, we share alike both blessings and challenges. We share in a single system of salvation. We strive to walk the same straight and narrow path. We read the same scriptures. We frequent the same holy temples of God, participating in their holy ordinances. We partake of the same sacrament and share spiritual gifts. We are called to serve and are released from serving in the kingdom of God by the same divine authority. We depend upon the same atonement for immortality and upon obeying the same commandments for eternal life. We are to cultivate the same celestial attributes and to develop the same righteous reflexes.

There are other shared realities, too, however. For example, as women are more and more *in* the world, the tendency, as with men, will be, alas, for some women to become more *of* the world. Unless they are women of faith, this process will inexorably occur. A father-prophet's reproving, tender words to an erring child would be no less instructive had they been, "But this was no excuse for thee, my daughter" (see Alma 39:4).

For us all, whatever one's roles, assignments, or achievements, any move away from Christ is a move toward unhappiness and emptiness. The praise and applause of the world may, for the moment, muffle the grim sounds of such movement—but the distance will still be there, and the consequences. There are no immunities because of gender, as sin isolates the individual and destroys the tastebuds of the soul. Hence, the laughter of the world is really loneliness trying to reassure itself, whether the hollow laughter is masculine or feminine.

The strategic challenges to sustain faith are likewise the same for us all; the only variations are tactical. Jesus taught how temptation, persecution (also, intriguingly, fear of perse-

cution), tribulation, and the cares of the world draw us away from Him (see Matthew 13:21; Luke 8:13–14; D&C 40:2).

Into those broad but debilitating categories the tactical challenges fit. For instance, the cares and anxieties of the world include being unduly anxious about receiving the praise and honors of the world. Fear of persecution includes the unwillingness to bear the mocking and scorning of the world.

Temptation includes the lure of more worldly lifestyles. For some, the straight and narrow path seems to be too confining; hence, such seek a little more room to commit "a little sin," to "lie a little"—to do a little more merrymaking. After all, they reason, for conforming a little bit to the fashion of the world, God will only "beat us with a few stripes" (2 Nephi 28:8).

Shared, too, is the matter of to whom we look for leadership. Meridian-day Saints, like Mary and Dorcas, did not, for instance, look for guidance or satisfaction from the prestigious Sanhedrin, the Sadducees, the Pharisees, Herod, Caiaphas, Pilate—or even regal Rome and its Caesars, whose impressive days of power spanned centuries. Instead, these and other saintly sisters viewed things with the eye of faith and thereby saw "things as they really are" (Jacob 4:13). They had the precious perspective of the gospel.

It is no different in our day. Faith cannot be placed safely in the arm of flesh (see D&C 1:19), nor happiness derived from "the things of the flesh" (Romans 8:5). For all the faithful, therefore, the ultimate and most demanding goal is that which was stated unmistakably three times in holy writ:

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

"Therefore I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect" (3 Nephi 12:48).

“What manner of men [and women] ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am” (3 Nephi 27:27).

Indeed, for brothers and sisters alike, to be truly about our Heavenly Father’s business consists in striving to become like His Only Begotten Son. His cardinal qualities include love, mercy, meekness, purity, patience, and spiritual submissiveness. Being portable, these qualities, insofar as we have developed them, will rise with us in the resurrection, when so little else will.

Given this, our grand objective, it is vital to inventory and ponder some of our challenges and our opportunities, which exist side by side like the wheat and tares, for it will be in that setting that we are to strive to emulate the Master.

Since you live in a time of prophecies in fulfillment, rather than simply prophecies under anticipatory discussion, this sampling may suffice. I stress that whatever our roles or the sector of our service, we can contemplate the tapestry of our time, seeing divine design and pattern whatever our season of life or circumstance.

Jesus foresaw the last days, when “because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold” (Matthew 24:12). This coarsening is spreading in our time. Paul said the incontinent among us would be “fierce, despisers of those that are good” (2 Timothy 3:3). This coarsening will, alas, include some of the women of the world, not just the men. For me, seeing the language of the locker spread to the living room or kitchen under the guise of emancipation and sophistication is sad indeed. I never liked it in the locker room, because its sounds diminished and degraded all who spoke and listened.

As some of the people of the world become more coarse and more hard, there will be a lessening of the collective capacity to love. Pathetically, this diminution of love will occur in a world in which, already, there is not enough love to go

around. The women of God who play nurturing roles in families and neighborhoods will thus become increasingly prized even as the coarsening feeds on itself, spilling its harsh and multiple consequences out upon society.

This foretold resentment of righteousness, this hardening with its inconsistent regard for human life, and this desensitizing will make of the human environment a slum, however adorned it may be by creature comforts. Such increasing iniquity will not only bring the coldness Jesus prophesied, but also devastating despair. This, too, was foretold by one of His prophets, who said, “Despair cometh because of iniquity” (Moroni 10:22).

Technology ensures that people in one nation will feel the pains and difficulties and perplexities of those in another, illustrating, in part, how another of Jesus’ prophecies will be fulfilled: the nations of the earth shall be in distress, “with perplexity” (Luke 21:25). The distress of nations—whether reflecting failures in coping with famine, or international debt, disease, or arms control—will be very real. The seeming human inability to solve these perplexing problems will attest to the faulty, secular premises on which proposed solutions are based. The vision of the world is forever amiss, looking “beyond the mark” (Jacob 4:14). The women of faith will thus have to cope with these generalized circumstances (and also with some added challenges) precisely because they are genuine believers.

How genuine believers will be viewed by some is portrayed in the remarkable vision given to Lehi and then to Nephi. Therein we are treated to imagery involving a great and spacious building and its multitudes; it represents the “pride of the world” and “the world and the wisdom thereof” (1 Nephi 11:35–36). The inhabitants of the great and spacious building are strangely preoccupied with Church members,

pointing fingers of scorn and mocking members of the Church who seek to cling to the iron rod (see 1 Nephi 8). Some who have clung to the rod, alas, become ashamed, not for any objective reason, but “because of those that [are] scoffing at them” (1 Nephi 8:28).

This mocking and scorning of the Church and the things we hold sacred will persist. It was all foreseen, however, but so was the eventual joyous triumph of those who cling faithfully to the iron rod (see Mormon 8:21–22).

An angel also told Nephi that though members of the growing Church would be scattered upon all the face of the earth, their dominions would be comparatively small (see 1 Nephi 14:14). Why comparatively small? Because, said the angel, of the wickedness of this planet (see 1 Nephi 14:12).

Furthermore, the Saints of God will go through a sifting and winnowing process (see D&C 112:25; 1 Peter 4:17) but will reach a point in their spiritual development when the faithful will be “armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory” (1 Nephi 14:14). Obviously, a substantial portion of that great group of emerging Saints will be composed of the women of faith, just as sisters were cobuilders of the singular city of Enoch.

Sister sriptorians will savor this particular prophecy and will personally profit from its fulfillment:

“I beheld other books, which came forth by the power of the Lamb . . . unto the convincing of the Gentiles and the remnant of the seed of my brethren, and also the Jews . . . that the records of the prophets and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are true.

“ . . . These last records . . . shall establish the truth of the first, which are of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, and shall make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away from them; and shall make known to all kindreds,

tongues, and people, that the Lamb of God is the Son of the Eternal Father, and the Savior of the world” (1 Nephi 13:39–40).

The Holy Bible and these “other books” of scripture will, in your time, combine in a powerful witness that Jesus is the Christ, not merely a Plato in Palestine nor a Socrates in Samaria! The latter-day scriptures have also brought back certain plain and precious things which had been lost and have established the truth of the Holy Bible, especially its apostolic witness about Jesus Christ and the reality of resurrection. All of this is in fulfillment of the prophecy of Peter about those who engage in “denying the Lord that bought them” (2 Peter 2:1). No wonder President Spencer W. Kimball spoke about the need for appreciating and using sister sriptorians in our time.

Saintly sisters will pass through the times of which this sampling of prophecies is at least representative and will come to know, even more deeply, the truth of Paul’s declaration: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” (Romans 8:35).

The quiet certitude of our sisters will see them through these tempestuous times and prepare them and theirs for things joyous and glorious, such as Jesus’ triumphal return in power and glory.

On Patmos, after the “Amen” ended Jesus’ declarative words about His eventual return, John pleadingly added, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20). Before the Saints of the latter days are through, they, too, will pray without ceasing for Jesus to “come quickly.” Indeed, the very shortening of the time before His Son’s coming will be an act of mercy on the Father’s part.

Meanwhile, women of faith will have moments and even

seasons when they cannot explain what is happening to them or around them. Yet, as with Nephi of old, they will say, "I know that [God] loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things" (1 Nephi 11:17).

Time and time again, they will see the sobering truth of this saying with regard to this life: "The only way to go is through; there is no around." Being strong and hardy, these saintly sisters will replicate the experiences of their pioneer forebears, who, in the crossing of the plains, after burying their dead, resolutely picked up their handcarts and headed west.

It will not surprise me if, later, someone observes how so much of what the Church and its people will achieve in the last days of the last dispensation will be attributable to the spiritual superiority of Latter-day Saint women when compared with the women of the world.

Latter-day Saint women, who are full of faith, will steadfastly display quiet goodness like that of Dorcas:

"Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did" (Acts 9:36).

Faithful sisters will be spiritually submissive, like marvelous Mary of old. Entrusted with impending duties which she could not then fully comprehend, nevertheless Mary said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38).

Sisters of faith will have no difficulty believing in the word of God as it comes from His servants:

"And Ammon said unto her: Believest thou this? And she said unto him: I have had no witness save thy word, and the word of our servants; nevertheless I believe that it shall be according as thou hast said" (Alma 19:9).

Such believing capacity is a spiritual gift: "To others it is

given to believe on their words, that they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful" (D&C 46:14).

The women of God will also gladly spread His good news as witnesses:

"And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on [Jesus] for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did" (John 4:39).

Yet saintly sisters will be understandably anxious for family and others to attain their own full, firsthand witness:

"Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world" (John 4:42).

Our sisters will come to have greater and greater personal appreciation for the Savior's blessed benefactions, especially how "he suffereth the pains . . . of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam" (2 Nephi 9:21).

In the midst of these things, our sisters will make it possible for others to experience love at home and in a neighborhood in a cold world. In effect, they will thus be portable and persuasive preachments—sparkling sermons for all seasons. They will not, in the words of Paul, unduly "mind earthly things" (Philippians 3:19). Instead, women of faith will come to have "the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16). Since the women of faith are members of Heavenly Father's proven congregation of Saints, as God has revealed, they and the faithful men of the Church will become both "pure" and "tried" (D&C 100:16; 136:31).

Saintly sisters are usually the first to understand that in this life we live not by days but by deeds, not by seasons but by service. They will likewise have no difficulty realizing that God chose them before this world was. President Kimball put it well:

“Remember, in the world before we came here, faithful women were given certain assignments while faithful men were foreordained to certain priesthood tasks. While we do not now remember the particulars, this does not alter the glorious reality of what we once agreed to. You are accountable for those things which long ago were expected of you just as are those we sustain as prophets and apostles!”¹

These women of God have a view of life in which mortality is seen not as linear but as experiential, not chronological so much as developmental. Hence, the high need for faith and patience as the sculpturing of souls proceeds (see Mosiah 23:21).

Such sisters have the capacity to cope with seeming routine and repetition, doing the chores of family life and the work of the kingdom with minimal muttering. This capacity to keep moving forward simultaneously develops another capacity: to “endure . . . well” to the end of one’s mortal life (D&C 121:8).

Righteous women are less demanding of the Lord with regard to life. Being less demanding, they are able to give more abundantly without any concern for credit or without regard for recognition.

Worldly women, however, want to fashion a selfish future while ignoring the harsh lessons of the past. They also want happiness without righteousness. Like their male counterparts, these women of the world seek “for that which ye could not obtain; . . . for happiness in doing iniquity” (Helaman 13:38; see also Alma 41:11). As Mormon observed of another sad group, these women of the world suffer “the sorrowing of the damned” because they fail to learn fully that we cannot “take happiness in sin” (Mormon 2:13).

In contrast, the women of light, being idealists without illusions, know that happiness can be obtained only in the

context of righteousness and selflessness; the women of light are not blind to the lessons of spiritual history. Paul wrote to the faithful Saints, demarking the time since their spiritual conversion as being that “after ye were illuminated” (Hebrews 10:32), meaning, of course, since the light of the gospel and the gift of the Holy Ghost had lighted up their lives and behavior. There is a luminosity that goes with gospel gladness, a spiritual radiance. It is an almost physical thing. It is to be seen in the faces of the women of faith.

Since the light of Christ lights everyone who comes into this world (see D&C 93:2; John 1:9), that spark, which some call conscience, is still present in the lives of many women and men of all races, nations, creeds, and cultures. The women of the Church will enhance that intrinsic illumination by sharing with others the full light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our sisters will be the means of bringing into the fold many who seek to come in out of the cold. They will be your friends forever and call your names blessed.

Unsurprisingly, the women of Christ, like Him whom they follow, will—especially in today’s world—give more love than they receive; they will offer more truth than is accepted. But no matter!

Our sisters will also have increasing appreciation of and a spiritual appetite for the things of the holy temple. Should we be surprised that these spirit daughters of our Heavenly Father would feel so at home—indeed would tarry there longer—in His holy house? As they encounter the profound truths and ordinances of the temple, today’s women of faith will do as Mary did when confronted with things she could not then fully understand: “But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19). Temple truths, some scattered in the scriptures, are like pulsating flames of fire for those who have eyes to see.

So much will depend on how the women of the Church treat the sacred things of God. Said President Brigham Young: "If [a mother treats] lightly the things of God, it is more than likely her children will be inclined to do the same."²

Men of faith and women of faith are, of course, alike in their developing spiritual submissiveness, in their unconditional trust of God. They do not ask for advance explanations or even reassurances. It was so not only with Mary but also with three special young men who entered their fiery furnace knowing "our God . . . is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace. . . . *But if not*, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods" (Daniel 3:17–18; italics added).

Those three little words "but if not" convey so very much. Just as valiant were the three virgins noted in the book of Abraham who actually were sacrificed because they, too, refused to worship false gods (see Abraham 1:11).

Opposition will come; it will be clever. There will be casualties. Still, nothing can separate this people and our righteous women from the love of Christ and from bringing to pass the fulfillment of all that is to be done in this dispensation in preparation for His second coming.

A word about casualties, since the reasons for falling away are similar, whether among men or among women. My sample of a few adult male friends who have fallen away is large enough to generalize somewhat, though these observations apply differently. For some, imperfections in Church members and leaders, past or present, became a cover for withdrawal into looser lifestyles. Another factor was becoming thoroughly fascinated and preoccupied with the professional cares, the reinforcing rewards, and the praise of the world. Withering followed scorching, "because they had no deepness of earth" (Matthew 13:5). Developing selfish expectations of life in the kingdom was present. All of this handful were and are proud,

and they cultivated their doubts instead of their faith. The sample is small, but the results, though not surprising, are very sad. Happily, some of these have now made their way back.

But, to return to the shared work of the Lord:

In furthering the establishment of the kingdom of God on the earth, certain specific things—both sobering and exciting—need to occur, involving both brothers and sisters alike. For instance, in Book of Mormon times when the Church was more fully established, this condition meant more converts, to be sure, but it also meant that members themselves were "awakened to a remembrance of their duty" (Alma 4:3). Members checked their pride and began to be more humble and more prayerful. Think of how many casualties were prevented! Alma referred to this as their "victory over the devil" (Alma 16:21). One of the happy outcomes of this was that the "word of God [was] preached in its purity in all the land, and the Lord [poured] out his blessings upon the people" (Alma 16:21).

I mention these ancient circumstances because they indicate what must happen in the Church today. The Lord has indicated that Zion must "increase in beauty, and in holiness" and that "her stakes must be strengthened," obvious references to spiritual growth (D&C 82:14). Zion's borders are also to be enlarged, indicating numerical growth. Likewise, we are instructed about how the Lord's army must "become very great"—another numerical indication. Yet that same army is to become "sanctified" (D&C 105:31). Thus, there must be, cheek by jowl, both numerical and spiritual growth in the Church.

Remember what Nephi saw? In the latter days, the covenant people of the Lord would be scattered upon all the face of the earth; they would be "armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory" (1 Nephi 14:14).

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Though the dominions of the growing Church will still remain comparatively small in the burgeoning human family, this comparatively small size will be so because of the wickedness in the world (see 1 Nephi 14:12). In the building of the pure in heart, Zion and the stakes of Zion are not only convenient administrative entities in the Church but also spiritual sanctuaries, places for “a defense, and for a refuge from the storm” (D&C 115:6).

Thus is the shared work which lies before us, and the sisters of faith will play such a large part in accomplishing it. Therefore, while talking about other challenges and opportunities and about the tactical challenges that go with roles, assignments, and concerns—real and needed as these discussions may be—we should place all of these things in the larger spiritual and scriptural context. Besides, like it or not, the women of faith are placed in history. These days are your days in the history of the kingdom, and you must make of them days never to be forgotten.

The summational wisdom attributed to eighteenth-century British clergyman William Law applies to all: “If you have not chosen the Kingdom of God first, it will in the end make no difference what you have chosen instead,” because, as Moroni said, “the eternal purposes of the Lord shall roll on, until all his promises shall be fulfilled” (Mormon 8:22).

1. Spencer W. Kimball, “The Role of Righteous Women,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, p. 102.

2. Brigham Young, discourse of 8 Oct. 1876, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: Latter-day Saints Book Depot, 1853–86), 18:263.