
Speaking Today

Married or Single: Look beyond Yourself

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I deem it a special honor and privilege to be invited to speak to the sisters in this conference. I acknowledge in a very inadequate and feeble way my great debt of gratitude to the great women I have been privileged to know, to learn from, to emulate, and to admire. They include both my beloved grandmothers, my sainted mother and mother-in-law, and mostly my beloved wife and companion, my adored daughters, and grand-daughters.

But my appreciation for womanhood goes beyond those of my immediate family, because so many of my teachers in Sunday School, Primary, Mutual, and school were women. Because many of the women I have admired were single—that is, either unmarried or widowed, and in a few cases divorced—I should like to direct my message primarily to the single sisters of the Church. I should like to emphasize potentials and horizons rather than any supposed limitations.

Some may have said to themselves, "I am a single person. I have no stature or position. I am new in the Church. My talents and abilities are limited. My contribution is small. Why should I make an extra effort to be faithful?" Or they may say, "I am too old to change. I have already lived my life. I am unimportant."

For some years I served as president of the International Mission. That mission encompasses the members of the Church throughout the world not living in organized missions or stakes. The Saints all over the world would communicate with us and send their tithing in to the mission office in Salt Lake City. Each year as I reviewed the tithing, I noticed that as regularly as the months came and went, we received an envelope and tithing contribution from Lucille Sargent in Peking, China. Her faithfulness was exceptional because she was the only member of the Church in Peking. I knew little of her, but on one occasion mentioned her name to some of the members of the Council of the Twelve. Elder Gordon B. Hinckley then filled in the missing pieces of the puzzle. Lucille Sargent has been in the Foreign Service of the United States for over twenty years,

living in remote areas, behind the iron curtain, most of the time alone. She never married. She was placed in some areas at the very time that the Lord opened up those countries for the preaching of the gospel. She was most helpful in every instance.

When I was released as president of the International Mission, I said to my successor, Elder Carlos E. Asay, "Some day I want the privilege of knowing Lucille Sargent." A few weeks ago Sister Faust and I had that privilege. My Ruth said to Lucille, "How did you manage all alone to maintain your spiritual strength?" Her answer was, "I always pray aloud, and on Sunday I would sing some hymns and pray aloud and read the scriptures." In consideration of her assignments, she told her supervisors, "I can take these difficult posts. I have special help." Everyone who works with her knows who she is and what she is.

My message to you single sisters is one of hope and appreciation and blessing for what you are and what you have done and what you will do. President Harold B. Lee has said of you:

"Those without mates—some of you do not now have a companion in your home. Some of you have lost your wife or husband, or you may not yet have found a companion. In your ranks are some of the noblest members of the church—faithful, valiant, striving to live the Lord's commandments, to help build the kingdom on earth, and to serve your fellowmen.

"Life holds so much for you. Take strength in meeting your challenges. There are so many ways to find fulfillment, in serving those who are dear to you, in doing well the tasks that are before you in your employment or in your home. The Church offers so much opportunity for you to help souls, beginning with your own, to find the joy of eternal life.

"Do not let self-pity or despair beckon you from the course you know is right. Turn your thoughts to helping others. To you the words of the master have special meaning, 'He that findest his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake, shall find it' ([Matt. 10:39](#))."
(Harold B. Lee, *Strengthening the Home*, pamphlet, 1973, p. 8).

I wish to affirm that the principal benefit which will come to the adult singles of the Church will not be principally in activities, but rather in service. By service, I mean not the showcase variety involving ourselves in notoriety and publicity, but the Christlike quality of service on a one-to-one basis. Cultural and social activities are very important, but the primary emphasis should be on service. A daily selfless service to another should be on the agenda of our activities.

There is much in discipleship in the Church which is not of organization or program, but rather of spirit and reaching towards a second birth and a reawakening, followed by an eternal searching for that which is noble and good. It is a striving to be twice born. Like Nicodemus, many will inquire, "How can these things be?" ([John 3:9](#)). The answer is still the same. Unless a man or woman be born of the water and of the Spirit, he cannot be twice born. To be spiritually born of God means that we must be able to answer affirmatively to the query of Alma, "Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?" ([Alma 5:14](#)).

Many single members of the Church feel that their bitterness overflows, and they wrongfully think that this cup passes others by. In his first words to the people on this continent, Jesus of Nazareth himself poignantly spoke of the bitter cup the Father had given him (see [3 Ne. 11:11](#)). Every married or single soul has some bitterness to swallow. Parents having a child who loses his way come to know a sorrow that defies description. A woman whose husband is cruel or insensitive

can break her heart every day. Having drunk the bitter cup, however, there comes a time when one must accept the situation as it is and reach upward and outward. The Savior boxed the compass many years ago. We must be reborn again every day in spirit and heart.

Divorce statistics reveal that married life for most is not what it should be. But I have now lived long enough to know that, whatever our situation, our troubles melt and disappear like frost in the morning sun when we dwell upon our blessings rather than our disappointments. No matter how pessimistic one's view may become of the times and the seasons, we can always fall back on special friendship, on faithful, personal love, and on simple, true dealings in our own personal lives.

In *Hamlet*, Polonius gives this advice to his son,

*Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel.*
(Act 1, sc. 3).

We all wonder, "How can I know the way?" This was the question asked of the Master. We shall know the way by looking beyond ourselves. A trusted friend states, "I need to be reminded of the dangers of turning inward, of grabbing too tightly to my own soul. In trying to preserve myself, I would squeeze all of the life out of myself. There are grave dangers in considering too prominently our own desires and needs which strangle the opportunity to look beyond ourselves."

This is not a passive life. The word of God constantly sets before us images of vigor and action and power, all of which images and actions under his benign guidance can be directed and controlled and, in most cases, realized.

It is a mistake for women to think that life begins only upon marriage. A woman can and must have an identity and be useful and feel important and needed whether she is single or married. She must feel that she has something to offer. Shakespeare, speaking through Portia, said, ... *For myself alone I would not be ambitious in my wish,*
*To wish myself much better; yet, for you
I would be trebled twenty times myself.*
(*Merchant of Venice*, Act 3, sc. 2).

In the message of the Redeemer, there is an offer of hope to all, including those who feel poor in spirit and downtrodden, unloved, and unlovely. It is a transcending hope of a new spiritual birth. There is a great freedom for those who are born anew of the Spirit. They can be like the wind which bloweth where it listeth, and no man knoweth "whence it cometh, and whither it goeth" (**John 3:8**). Thus being twice born, they can be free from the restricting shackles of self-pity, doubt, discouragement, and loneliness, and be lifted up in lofty, noble pursuits. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint" (**Isa. 40:31**).

They who take upon themselves the burdens of others shall find unspeakable joy. This great transcending happiness is available to all, even to the most humble and forlorn. It is within the grasp of the lowliest. We reach the Creator through his children. Whosoever gives a cup of water to the thirsty gives it to the Savior; and whoso receives of that water receives the infinite Father who sent Him. The ministering to others must not always be to our own. The Savior of the world said it simply, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have

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done it unto me" (**Matt. 25:40**).

Perhaps one of your gifts in life is as simple and effortless as the giving of a smile or a kind word. A simple but sublime communication from one who cares can elevate the lonely soul so that the trouble may be lifted. We are indebted to Henry Ward Beecher for this marvelous thought that "Affliction comes to us all not to make us sad, but sober; not to make us sorry, but wise. It is trial that proves one thing weak and another strong. A cobweb is as good as the mightiest cable when there is no strain upon it" (in *Useful Quotations*, comp. Trynan Edwards, New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1933, pp. 12, 658).

It is well recognized that many of the adult singles of the Church may not have all of the blessings which they desire at this time. They are, however, on equal footing in terms of their ability to keep the two great commandments, that is, to love God and to love their fellow men, and to be abundantly blessed and strengthened thereby. The quality of their spirituality and devotion to the Master can be as fulfilling for them as for anyone. The quality of their goodness to others can likewise be as meaningful and rewarding as can the service of anyone.

Certainly, spiritual understanding and a testimony are available to all who earnestly seek them and keep the commandments. Elder Bruce R. McConkie of the Council of the Twelve recently said, "And because God is no respecter of persons, everyone in the Church who will get on his knees and ask the Lord for guidance and direction will receive identically that same knowledge, that same assurance, and that same understanding" ("Succession in the Presidency," in *Speeches of the Year 1974*, Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1975, p. 27).

If we are to be strengthened in the inner person, the inner self must be purged and cleansed of transgression. Companionship with evil causes our whole being to die spiritually. The spiritual tap in our lives will not turn on until all transgressions involving moral turpitude are purged. I refer not only to sexual transgressions, but also to all forms of wrongdoing, including lying, cheating, self-deception, stealing, and consciously or recklessly inflicting injury upon others. An important part of the spiritual being of all of us is the quiet and sacred part of each from which we may feel a sanctification in our lives.

Paul was speaking of this part when he counseled us "to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man" (**Eph. 3:16**). It is that part of us wherein no other soul intrudes. It is that part of us which permits us to come close to the divine both in and out of this world. We open the portals thereof when we pray. This portion of our beings is reserved only for ourselves and our Creator. It is here that we retreat and meditate. It is possible for the Holy Ghost to abide in this special part of us. It is a place of special communion.

The oppressive fog which beclouds the tortuous lanes and passages of our lives will disappear in the spiritual sunlight which comes only from God. This spiritual sunlight will not shine unless we diligently and humbly seek to enjoy his Spirit, for "Behold, the Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind" (**D&C 64:34**). The Spirit of the Lord can ever be with us in the overheated ovens of life into which we may be cast, so that those who behold us will always see us with a Holy Companion.

Like Nebuchadnezzar looking into the fiery furnace, "did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? ... Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God" (**Dan. 3:24, 25**).

May the single members of the Church find in their thoughts and actions the manifestation of an inward spiritual peace and strength. May they have an absolute faith that all things are possible to God and hold in their remembrance that through their obedience, all things may be known unto them by his Holy Spirit, for “he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” ([Gal. 6:8](#)). And in sowing through the Spirit, may they be strengthened in their inner selves with might by his Spirit, for spirituality is like sunlight; it passes into the unclean and is not tainted.

May our lives be such that the spiritual within us may ascend up through the common, the sordid, the unbidden, and the unconscious.

I bear a simple and humble testimony that the companionship of our Heavenly Father will be with all who struggle humbly and righteously to seek him. I invoke the blessings of Almighty God to be upon you sisters—all of you, married and single—and bless you to reach your great and noble potential. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

Gospel topics: single members, women

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