



The

B

e

Season

Aileen H. Clyde

Second Counselor in the General Relief Society Presidency
of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

S t

This address was given at the J. Reuben Clark Law School Fireside, November 12, 1995.

I want to express my need for the spirit to attend us since I want to speak to you informally about personal and scriptural reflections on that great gift, the gift of the Spirit, in our lives. By its power we can be unified collectively, and by its power we can be magnified individually.

When Elaine L. Jack was called as general Relief Society president in April 1990 and Chieko Okazaki and I joined her as counselors, our first need was to find spiritual unity as we combined our diverse experiences in order to represent, for a time, the women of the Church.

President Jack was born in the shadow of the Cardston Temple, grew up in Canada, and then came to the University of Utah. She married her husband Joe, and they went east where he did his training as a surgeon. After living in New York and Alaska, they settled in Salt Lake City.

President Okazaki was born of Japanese parents in Hawaii. She converted from Buddhism. No member of her family has since joined the Church. She married Ed Okazaki (who died suddenly in 1992), but he was not a member of the Church then. She had faith that because he was such a good man, the Spirit would work on him. Within a year after marriage, he did join the Church.

I was born and reared in Springville, Utah. My husband, Hal, and I met there in high school. I still go to some effort (by commuting to and from Salt Lake City) to sleep there. I studied and taught at BYU. While I've made many forays away from Utah County, I know its furrows, valleys, hillsides, and cirques by what they feel like to the feet and what they conjure in the heart.

For Chieko and me, these Relief Society calls came on a Friday afternoon. We were in General Conference Saturday and Sunday listening and seeking. When those meetings ended, President Jack asked us if we could meet at 8 a.m. the next morning with just-released Barbara Winder and her counselors, Joy Evans and JoAnn Doxey. Sister Winder had been called with her husband to the Czechoslovakian mission and her time with us was limited to the next morning. Thus it was that in this matter, as in so many others, the time to get life's tasks in order and to get ready was past. A transition occurred and an

intense new focus crowded out matters that a week before had seemed compelling.

For me the great blessing was our charge to seek God's will for the women of the Church. Surely, through Relief Society, women could accomplish together, in the spirit of charity, much more than any of us could ever accomplish alone. I felt a new assurance in the strength of our sisterhood as daughters of God. I knew again that righteous efforts of each one are essential to building Zion. I thought again of how many daughters there are and have been who were meant to be enveloped in God's love. I considered again the unique qualities of each of his children and the unifying gift he had prepared for us as he offered the gift of his Spirit.

President Jack suggested in our first week together a time of seclusion where we could come to better know one another. We spent a day studying scriptures to gain the clarity we needed to articulate the purposes and goals of Relief Society in the new decade before us. President Jack began the readings that day by opening the Book of Mormon. In Jacob 4:3 she read:

For the Spirit speaketh the truth and lieth not. Wherefore, it speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be; wherefore, these things are manifested unto us plainly, for the salvation of our souls.

As she finished reading, I looked over at Chieko and saw tears in her eyes. There were some in mine too. All three of us had chosen that scripture among the ones we had planned to share. That convergence helped us resolve to understand present realities in gospel light, to use that understanding as we taught hope for the future and faith in Christ. We asked, What are the circumstances surrounding our sisters' lives? How can Relief Society include and bless each one amidst their widely varying conditions of life and status? That direction from Jacob 4 became our hallmark as we began to serve our sisters in the Lord's organization for women.

Since those days in 1990, we've heard from women all over the Church that what they want most from their Relief

Society organization is spiritual strength. Such expressed desires have motivated our quest to understand what they mean. What is spiritual experience? What may stanch it and what gives it nurture?

We've all had communal experience that touched us spiritually at hearing a sincere prayer or responding to hymns and other beautiful music. I've seen a Thai young woman accompany her sacrament meeting congregation on a portable keyboard as they struggled with the western tones and words of "O Little Town of Bethlehem" with electric spiritual effect. In Recife, Brazil, a chorus of Relief Society sisters who sang "Where Can I Turn For Peace?" had memorized the words in English. Their efforts brought the most wonderful relief from my days' long angst at not understanding Portuguese, and their countenances glowed with charity.

But even when we feel we have shared spiritual experience, individual responses are uniquely our own.

And it came to pass when they heard this voice, and beheld that it was not a voice of thunder, neither was it a voice of great tumultuous noise, but behold, it was a still voice of perfect mildness, as if it had been a whisper, and it did pierce even to the very soul— [Helaman 5:30]

Such getting to the soul happens to me unexpectedly at times. But I know because of the scriptures what it means when the Spirit speaks to my soul and pierces in a way I cannot mistake it. It is this voice that brings peace and puts the joy in rejoicing.

Listen to Parley P. Pratt's eloquent description of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

*It inspires, develops, cultivates, and matures all the fine-toned sympathies, joys, tastes, kindred feelings, and affections of our nature. It inspires virtue, kindness, goodness, tenderness, gentleness, and charity. It develops beauty of person, form and features. It tends to health, vigor, animation and social feeling. It . . . invigorates all the faculties of the physical and intellectual [person]. [Parley P. Pratt, *Key to Theology*, 4th ed., 96-97 as quoted in James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 488]*

My spiritual understandings were greatly influenced by my mother, who joined the

Church as an adult. She was an only and high-achieving daughter of a Presbyterian family. Her acquaintance with the Bible through her early church life was enhanced when she majored in English in college and studied the Bible as literature. She was teaching English and French in a high school when she met my father, who was also on the faculty. His wife had died in the 1918 flu epidemic, and he was left with a baby son.

As their friendship developed, they both were aware that her not being a Mormon was a major matter. Although her parents had lived among Mormons, they had deeply held biases about Mormon theology and about temple marriage and eternal covenants. Mother knew her understanding of the restored gospel came mainly by hearsay, so she decided to “take instruction.”

There were no local missionaries to assist with such a task; member referrals were unknown then in local Utah communities. My father’s father, as a bishop for 25 years, had done such instruction from time to time. But my father hoped for objectivity, so he sought out another bishop who lived some miles away. This bishop handed her the Book of Mormon and said, “Go and read this, and when you have read it come back.”

Mother received the book on a Thursday morning and was back to talk with the bishop by Saturday afternoon. As she went in he said, “Sister, I said that you should read the whole book!” She said, “I have read the whole book!”

Probably because of her background as a reader and with her appreciation of biblical truths, as she read she received a spiritual conviction that couldn’t be denied. She said in those brief days she found many answers about her relationship with God and Jesus Christ. The truths left an indelible impression that she felt came from the Holy Spirit.

Her newly found knowledge directly conflicted with her beloved parents, who at first disowned her at the time of her baptism and subsequent temple marriage. This heart-rending yet elevating time helped her form the methods she used with her children—depending on scripture for life-guiding principles.

My mother read one verse often to me. It helped establish my basic belief in God’s fairness. It contrasts with biased priestcraft practices clearly described in verses preceding it.

We are taught that the Lord has given a commandment that all should have charity. Without charity we have nothing. It is explained to us that the iniquities and evils of this world are murder, lying, stealing, envying, having malice and whoredoms. The list is explicit. Then in 2 Nephi 26:33 we are told:

For none of these iniquities come of the Lord; for he doeth that which is good among the children of men; and he doeth nothing save it be plain unto the children of men; and he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile.

Societies generally have neither understood nor practiced the concepts of that scripture. Two examples demonstrate how women particularly have suffered from this lack:

My South America assignment, which included Arequipa, Peru, coincided with the discovery in the high mountains near there of the frozen remains of what *Time* and *Newsweek* called, “an ice maiden.” She was, it is supposed, an Inca princess about 12 to 14 years old. Because of the way she was frozen, her body fluids, her hair and her skin are all intact and remarkably well preserved. Consequently, scientists came from around the world to study this startling find.

I was struck that there had been a people as sophisticated, disciplined, and diligent as the Incas. Yet, in their search for spiritual strength, they would offer one of their most precious holdings to appease the god of the mountain, whom they feared and worshiped. Without the teachings of Christ, without knowledge of what sacrifice is or is not to be, things can be done that not only are misguided but can be an awful waste.

As I was contemplating the Inca princess, I remembered a story in Judges, chapter 11. It reflects another time in a different culture, and it too suggests waste masquerading as sacrifice.

Jephtha was born in a village to a harlot. In due time his father had other wives and

children and Jephtha was driven out of that village because he lacked status. He became strong physically and must have been remarkable, maybe somewhat like Samson, because he was well known. When war with the Ammonites was imminent, the villagers sent for Jephtha and asked him to lead their armies. Jephtha accepted the challenge. He must have had some teachings about God because as we read in Judges 11:30-31:

And Jephtha vowed a vow unto the Lord, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into my hands,

Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord’s, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.

Now I don’t know who Jephtha thought might come from his house when he returned in peace from fighting the children of Ammon. I don’t know why he thought that in order for God to support him and to strengthen him and to be with him that he needed to make such a brash vow. But the record says he did.

And Jephtha came to Mizpeh unto his house, and behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter.

And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! thou has brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back.

And she said unto him, my father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; forasmuch as the Lord hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon.

And she said unto her father, Let this thing be done for me: let me alone two months that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows [sisters].

And he said, Go. And he sent her away for two months: and she went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains.

And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had

vowed: and she knew no man. And it was a custom in Israel,

That the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephtha the Gileadite four days in a year. [Judges 11:34-40]

For me, the story cautions that if we know God, we know what he asks in terms of sacrifice, and we know he would not require us to sacrifice another. I also find in this story an early account of the importance

ordinance coming to us through priesthood power and is also administered to us, men and women, exactly the same way.

As we go forward in our spiritual lives and are able to go to the temple to receive endowments and make eternal covenants, we find that men and women do that in exactly the same way. This equity is evidence of God's love for us regardless of where we are or of our gender, status, stage of education, or nationality. He wants us all

leaders together, inviting them to listen to one another, to understand the resource they can be to each other. In their culture that is difficult. It has not been practiced. They have had other ways of communicating. It is hard for them to change, just as our ways are hard for us to change. It is important for us to comprehend that the culture of Christ is the only culture we aspire to live. In that culture, we love and respect one another; we share perspectives and listen to one another. We

----- Our best season depends on our efforts to build on that foundation. -----

of sisterhood since that's where the daughter turned as she prepared for her ordeal.

In 3 Nephi 9:19-20 we read:

And ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood; yea, your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away, for I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings.

And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit. And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him [or her] will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost.

Though maidens are no longer sacrificed, I think we, too, are sometimes involved in making "sacrifices" that the Lord may not ask for, wasting things that if we really understood the Lord, we would not waste.

Our God invites us to make life-giving alliances with him. Think of the covenants we have made. I believe the first time we had Christ's teachings pierce our souls was in our premortal existence when we understood the options available to us. We understood the plans that had been presented, and we took the initiative to either stand or raise our hand or in some other way say, I will follow Christ. If we had not done that we would not be here. That was the first great commitment and covenant we made with Christ—that we would follow him.

Then we come here and are taught the gospel and have the opportunity for baptism. The saving ordinances of the gospel that lead us to salvation and exaltation come to men and to women, to boys and to girls in exactly the same way. For example, we are baptized the same way. The other covenant that we can make regularly to remember Christ is to partake of the sacrament. That covenant is an

to have those blessings and makes it possible for each of us to have them.

One purpose of a recent assignment I had in South America was to assess in a brief time and a large area, "things as they really are" (Jacob 4:13). I faced cities as huge as Santiago, Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and even Fortaleza and Recife (which though somewhat smaller in Brazil, are large cities to a person who grew up in Springville, Utah). I knew that I could only teach and gain valid perceptions through the Spirit.

On arriving in Santiago, I learned that in Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay there have been 50,000 baptisms in the past year. In Brazil, one country, there were 45,000 baptisms in one calendar year. These people have heard the Spirit. They know what it's like. They have been converted by the Spirit. The spiritual promise is explained in 3 Nephi 9:14:

Yea, verily I say unto you, if ye will come unto me ye shall have eternal life. Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him [or her] will I receive; and blessed are those who come unto me.

And yet, having come unto Christ and having made the baptismal covenant, members of the Church in South America are struggling, as we struggle, to more fully understand their part in that great commitment. They are learning, as we are, how to serve in Christ's Church, how to combine their abilities to meet the needs they see all around them—in the Church and in their societies. They struggle to learn how to counsel together. My assignment included talking to priesthood and Relief Society

are here to love and serve one another as Christ commanded, not to restrict, disparage, or discount one another.

President Gordon B. Hinckley said during April 1995 Conference: "Your obligation is as serious in your sphere of responsibility as is my obligation in my sphere" (*Ensign*, May 1995, 71). That statement enormously dignifies each of us in our efforts. The members in South America find that almost impossible to believe. They have such a sense of adoration for President Hinckley and all our priesthood leaders. It is difficult for them to believe in the worth of their souls and how necessary they are to building God's kingdom. That concept is difficult for us, too. It is interesting to look at another culture where differences seem apparent. It is easier to interpret them there. It is harder to see them among us. Yet, we too struggle to combine our abilities, to counsel together, to learn how to do things together—which is much better than if we try to act alone.

I saw a wariness in South America. I am sure it exists here—wariness about working together, men and women, whether at home or at Church or in our society generally. We need to recognize that Christ, through his prophets, through his apostles, has given us strong counsel about valuing one another, about recognizing the important part each one can play in building his kingdom.

There are many places in the scriptures we might look, but 1 Corinthians 12 teaches clearly the strength of diversity through unity of the spirit. Applying these truths would eliminate this wariness and bias.

Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit,

And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.

And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withall. . .

And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? . . .

And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: . . .

That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.

And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. [1 Corinthians 12: 4-7; 16-17; 21-22; 25-27]

At a general Relief Society meeting on September 23, 1995 President Hinckley spoke to the women of the Church. I was moved by his breadth of understanding and his expression. It was heartening and reassuring to hear his acute awareness of the challenges women face. He said something to the women that surprised me. I am still searching for the full meaning. He said, “I believe this is the best season for women in all the history of the world. In opportunities for education, for the training of your hands and minds, there has never before been a time when doors were so widely opened to you as they are today” (*Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 99). And he said it with a benediction, with a blessing. It sounded like he gloried in that truth and that he expected us to glory in it. We all need to search for its meaning to us.

I believe the opening of “doors” is best understood as we recognize God’s perfect equity in providing covenants essential to men and women in exactly the same way. The “doors” are opened by the restored gospel of Christ.

Women have had difficulties because of their gender for reasons that most don’t entirely understand. It was late in the 19th century before women even in the United States could fully matriculate at universities. Earlier in that century, it was sometimes possible for women to attend a college or a university, but rarely were women matriculated. Little by little those doors have opened and now many don’t even know there was a time when they were closed. I was born in 1926, and I remember my Mormon grandmother and my Presbyterian grandmother taking me aside on separate occasions and each telling me how fortunate I was to be born in a time when women could vote. Their pronouncement had little affect on me as a child, but it has become more important to me as I measure our progress today.

It seems to me that we should carefully and prayerfully look through the doors the prophet says are opening. We can each decide how those doors can be useful to us and equip us, not so much for the things the world expects, but to make us more constructive with one another. Those opportunities can help us be more able to do the things the Lord would have us do by better qualifying us to receive guidance from the Spirit—to be the disciples of Christ that we deserve to be.

Alma 9:26 is one of the most beautiful verses in scripture. I have many favorites, but I turn to this one often. I find it lifts my soul and particularly helps me sense what coming to Christ is about.

And not many days hence the Son of God shall come in his glory; and his glory shall be the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace, equity, and truth, full of patience, mercy, and long-suffering, quick to hear the cries of

his people and to answer their prayers. [Alma 9:26]

It seems to me that of all that comes to us by the Spirit—the most important is to know truth and know how to be equitable and merciful, to accept the blessings of Christ’s grace when we have done all that we can do. Then we, too, could respond as Christ would to bring peace, healing, happiness, and joy into the lives of our brothers and sisters.

And now . . . remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men [and women] build they cannot fall. [Helaman 5:12]

Our best season depends on our efforts to build on that foundation. President Howard W. Hunter advised us to pay ever more attention to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Living those teachings by the Spirit is our source of strength.

I am grateful to the Lord for his blessings in my life. It is wonderful to work with President Jack and President Okazaki. I have been blessed with a faithful, strong, supportive husband, three sons, three daughters-in-law, six granddaughters, and five grandsons. That is a joyful balance. I approach the Thanksgiving season with a full heart and the knowledge that he loves us and we are his children. I know that through him we may have eternal life. I pray that we all may have peace in our souls as we carry out our responsibilities and fulfill our intentions. I pray that we will remember that this is a great time in history for women and for men because of the restored gospel. I pray you might have that peace which comes through knowing that voice of perfect mildness. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

