

Episode 5

Stories from General Conference

SERVICE

[BEGIN MUSIC]

NARRATOR: From the Conference Center in Salt Lake City, Utah, this is “Stories from General Relief Society Meetings”. The topic of this collection is service. Every man, woman and child that becomes a member of the Church has taken upon themselves the responsibility to “bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light”. To start this collection, Sister Kathleen H. Hughes, in the 2003 General Relief Society Meeting, reminds us of our responsibility to serve others.

[END MUSIC]

(Sister Kathleen H. Hughes, October 2003, General Relief Society Meeting)

Twenty years ago I was called to be Young Women president in my ward. My hair was brown, and my body was . . . well, let's just say, a little more limber. Many years later I was called again to the same position, this time in a new ward. I was being recycled, and I found that exciting. It was my chance to renew my covenant to God that I would serve in whatever capacity He needed me. Now, however, my hair was naturally silver (or mostly so), and touching my toes had become a real strain. But I didn't feel too old to be blessed again by the lives of remarkable young women who were faithful, bright, and full of fun. I would like to think that by then I had a little more wisdom to give them and a deeper testimony of the gospel, but once again I learned as much from them as they did from me. Our sisterhood includes all ages and backgrounds; we are connected by the covenants we have made.

And remember, we don't outgrow those covenants. We can serve each other in every era of our lives. I heard recently of a young mother whose husband, a member of a bishopric, was sitting on the stand while she struggled with her restless children. A much older woman took the toddler on her lap and helped to quiet her. Such simple acts are part of building God's kingdom. It's what we do. It's who we are as sisters of Relief Society. Whether we are serving as president of the Relief Society or as a teacher in Primary or as the Young Women camp director, we are fulfilling our sacred responsibility as Relief Society sisters. When we call to check on an elderly neighbor or provide encouragement and help to a young mother or include another family in our prayers, we are keeping our covenants.

[BEGIN MUSIC]

NARRATOR: Each of us has some way we can serve and ease the burdens of others, no matter what our age. In the 2004 General Relief Society Meeting, Sister Kathleen H. Hughes tells us of some that continued remarkable service even in their older years.

[END MUSIC]

(Sister Kathleen H. Hughes, October 2004, General Relief Society Meeting)

When we are called to serve, we are not offered a release date. Our lives are our service. Lois Bonner, a woman in my stake who is 92 years old, began serving as a visiting teacher when she married over 65 years ago. She still faithfully serves. The Nelsons from Canada and the Ellsworth's from Utah, as missionaries, taught, mentored, and loved those of us who were in a small, growing ward in Missouri. We learned, through them, the joy of service and benefited from the wisdom of their experiences. I can think of no better way to thank our Father for all He gives us than to serve His children in every age of our lives.

[BEGIN MUSIC]

NARRATOR: As we dedicate ourselves to serving others, Heavenly Father can work miracles through us. President Thomas S. Monson now shares a story about some Relief Society sisters who through service reaped great rewards.

[END MUSIC]

(President Thomas S. Monson, October 1997, General Relief Society Meeting)

When I was bishop of the Sixth-Seventh Ward in Salt Lake City, back when we had a *Relief Society Magazine*, I noted that our record for subscriptions to that publication was low. Prayerfully my counselors and I analyzed the names of the individuals whom we could call to be magazine representative, and the inspiration dictated that Elizabeth Keachie should be given the assignment. She responded affirmatively to the call. She and her sister-in-law Helen Ivory, also a member of the ward, commenced to canvass the entire ward, house by house, street by street, and block by block. The result was phenomenal. We had more subscriptions to the *Relief Society Magazine* than had been recorded by all the other units of our stake combined.

I congratulated Elizabeth Keachie one Sunday evening and said to her, "Your task is done."

She replied, "Not yet, Bishop. There are two blocks we have not yet covered."

When she told me which blocks they were, I said, "Sister Keachie, no one lives on those blocks. That area is all industrial."

"Just the same," she said, "I'll feel better if I can go and check them myself."

Sister Keachie and Sister Ivory, on a rainy day, covered those final two blocks but discovered no homes. As they were about to discontinue their search, they noted a driveway which was strewn with mud puddles from a recent storm. It was next to a foundry. Sister Keachie gazed down the driveway perhaps 60 feet and could just make out a garage with a curtain at the window.

Deciding to investigate, the two sweet sisters walked through the mud to a point where the entire garage could be seen. Now they noticed a door, not visible from the street, which had been cut into the side of the garage. They noticed a chimney with smoke rising from it.

They knocked at the door. A man of about 65 years of age, William Ringwood, answered. They presented their story concerning the need of every home having the *Relief Society Magazine*. William Ringwood replied, "You'd better ask my father." Ninety-three-year-old Charles W. Ringwood then came to the door and also listened to the message. He subscribed.

Elizabeth Keachie reported to me the presence of these two men in our ward. When I requested their membership certificates from the Membership Department at the Presiding Bishopric's Office, I was told that the certificates had remained in the lost file of the Presiding Bishopric's Office for many years.

On Sunday morning Elizabeth Keachie brought to our priesthood meeting Charles and William Ringwood--the first time they had been inside a chapel for a long while. Charles Ringwood, 93, was the oldest deacon I had ever met, and his son was the oldest male member holding no priesthood I had ever met.

The elder Brother Ringwood was ordained a priest and then an elder. I shall never forget his interview with respect to seeking a temple recommend. He handed me a silver dollar which he took from an old worn leather coin purse and said, "This is my fast offering."

I replied, "Oh, Brother Ringwood, you owe no fast offering. You need it yourself."

"I want to receive the blessings, not keep the money," he responded.

It was my opportunity to take Charles Ringwood to the Salt Lake Temple and to attend with him the endowment session. That same evening Elizabeth Keachie served as proxy for the deceased Sister Ringwood.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, Charles Ringwood said to me, "Bishop, I told my wife just before she died 16 years ago that I would not delay in getting this work done. I am happy this has been accomplished."

Within two months, Charles W. Ringwood passed away. At his funeral service, I noticed his family sitting on the front row of the mortuary chapel, but I also noticed two sweet sisters sitting near the rear--Elizabeth Keachie and Helen Ivory. As I gazed upon those two sweet women, I thought of the 76th section of the Doctrine and Covenants: "I, the Lord, am merciful and gracious unto those who fear me, and delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and in truth unto the end. Great shall be their reward and eternal shall be their glory." I testify that we can find joy in service.

[BEGIN MUSIC]

NARRATOR: In the same talk, President Monson shares a story of a sister who had her burdens lifted through the service of caring Relief Society sisters.

[END MUSIC]

(President Thomas S. Monson, October 1997, General Relief Society Meeting)

An example of a narrow window of vision being replaced by vision unlimited took place at the Monroe, Louisiana, airport several years ago. I was on my way home from a regional meeting and met a lovely African-American sister who approached me and said joyfully, "President Monson, before I joined the Church and became a member of the Relief Society, I could not read. I could not write. None of my family could. You see, we were all poor sharecroppers. President, my white Relief Society sisters--they taught me to read. They taught me to write. Now I help teach other white sisters how to read and how to write." I reflected on the supreme happiness she must have felt when she opened her Bible and read for the first time the words of the Lord: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

[BEGIN MUSIC]

NARRATOR: There are so many different ways to serve! We should always be looking for opportunities to lift the burdens of others. Listen to the following story about a sister who went the extra mile in service. This was related in the 2007 General Relief Society Meeting by President Thomas S. Monson.

[END MUSIC]

(President Thomas S. Monson, October 2007, General Relief Society Meeting)

I learned recently of loving service given to a mother when her children were very young. Frequently she would be up in the middle of the night tending to the needs of her little ones, as mothers do. Often her friend and neighbor across the street would come over the next day and say, "I saw your lights on in the middle of the night and know you were up with the children. I'm going to take them to my house for a couple of hours while you take a nap." Said this grateful mother: "I was so thankful for her welcome offer, it wasn't until this had happened many times that I realized if she had seen my lights on in the middle of the night, she was up with one of her children as well and needed a nap just as much as I did. She taught me a great lesson, and I've since tried to be as observant as she was in looking for opportunities to serve others."

[BEGIN MUSIC]

NARRATOR: You're listening to 'Stories from General Relief Society Meetings'. The topic of this episode is service. In an address from the 2004 General Relief Society Meeting, Sister Bonnie D. Parkin tells the following story about selfless service by the sisters of a Relief Society in Pasadena, California.

[END MUSIC]

(Sister Bonnie D. Parkin, October 2004, General Relief Society Meeting)

Nearly a year ago, in Pasadena, California, Sister Janice Burgoyne was dying of cancer. She had shared generously of herself and was dearly loved. Her Relief Society sisters were bringing her meals, cleaning her house, caring for her two young sons, helping her husband plan a funeral. It was hard for Janice to receive so much help, knowing that her sisters would find that piece of old toast behind the couch. She worried her sisters would know more than her heart. But *because* her sisters knew her heart, it didn't matter. They provided car pools, tutored homework, played her piano, changed bedding. And they did it day after day after day, without complaint, with boundless charity. Such sharing forever changed those sisters. Before she died, Janice turned to a Relief Society sister and asked with gratitude and awe, "How does anyone die without Relief Society?"

[BEING MUSIC]

NARRATOR: These sisters realized that by helping others, you're also helping yourself. The next story, from the 2005 General Relief Society Meeting, also illustrates this principle. The story is told by Sister Kathleen H. Hughes.

[END MUSIC]

(Sister Kathleen H. Hughes, October 2005, General Relief Society Meeting)

In 1856, Julia and Emily Hill, sisters who had joined the Church as teenagers in England and been disowned by their family, had finally earned passage for their way to America and had almost reached their longed-for Zion. They were crossing the American plains with the Willie handcart company when they and many others were stranded on the trail by an early October storm. Sister Deborah Christensen, a great-granddaughter of Julia Hill, experienced this touching dream about them. She said:

"I could see Julia and Emily stranded in the snow on the windy summit of Rocky Ridge with the rest of the Willie handcart company. They had no heavy clothing to keep them warm. Julia was sitting in the snow, shaking. She could not carry on. Emily, who was freezing as well, knew that if she did not help Julia stand up, Julia would die. As Emily wrapped her arms around her sister to help her up, Julia began to cry—but no tears came, only soft whimpering sounds. Together they walked slowly to their handcart. Thirteen died that terrible night. Julia and Emily survived."

Sisters, without each other, these women probably would not have lived. In addition, they helped others survive this devastating portion of the journey, including a young mother and her children. It was Emily Hill Woodmansee who later wrote the beautiful words to the song "As Sisters in Zion." The verse "We'll comfort the weary and strengthen the weak" takes on new meaning when you imagine her experience on the snow-packed plains.

As with the Hill sisters, many of us will not survive our tests in mortality without help from others. And just as true: in helping others we keep our own spirits alive.

[BEGIN MUSIC]

NARRATOR: We'll all go through hard times in this life. But we're here together to help each other. In the Book of Mormon, King Benjamin told his people, "I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God." (Mosiah 2:17) We serve God by serving others.

This next story is from Sister Bonnie D. Parkin during the 2005 General Relief Society Meeting. She tells us what it means to be an instrument in the Lord's hands through service.

[END MUSIC]

(Sister Bonnie D. Parkin, October 2005, General Relief Society Meeting)

What does it mean to be an instrument in everyday terms? I think it means to nurture others. Joseph Smith called it acting "according to those sympathies" in our hearts. I have had many sweet moments when I have felt the Lord using me as an instrument. I believe that you too have been guided and helped as you teach, comfort, and encourage.

Yet as women we are pretty hard on ourselves! Believe me when I say each of us is much better than we think. We need to recognize and celebrate what we're doing right. Much of what we do seems small and insignificant—just a part of daily living. When we are called "to give an account to Jehovah," as the Prophet Joseph counseled, "I know that we will have much to share."

Let me give you an example. Recently I asked Elder William W. Parmley about his memories of his mother, LaVern Parmley, who served as the Primary general president for 23 years. He didn't refer to her talks at conferences or the many programs she implemented. He spoke of one of his sweetest moments when he was 17 and preparing to go away to college. He remembered sitting with his mother as she taught him how to sew on a button. With children of all ages, small and simple acts have lasting impact.

[BEGIN MUSIC]

NARRATOR: It's the small acts of kindness that show people they are cared about and loved. In the 2002 General Relief Society Meeting, Sister Anne C. Pingree tells us of a reminder she saw in an unexpected place about small acts of service.

[END MUSIC]

(Sister Anne C. Pingree, October 2002, General Relief Society Meeting)

Some years ago my husband and I visited the eastern sector of Berlin, Germany. Chunks of what was once the infamous wall dividing the citizens of that city were lying about—preserved as a memorial to the triumph of freedom over bondage. Written on one piece of the wall in bold, uneven red letters were these words: "*Many small people in many small places doing many small things can alter the face of the earth.*" To me that phrase

speaks of what each of us—as covenant women—can do to make a difference as we step forward offering our hearts and hands to the Lord by lifting and loving others.

[BEGIN MUSIC]

NARRATOR: In our final story, Sister Virginia U. Jensen refers to a great example of service: Mother Teresa. Mother Teresa received much praise for her work. But as you'll learn from this next story, it may be just a few small and simple things that touch others the most. This account is from the 1998 General Relief Society Meeting.

[END MUSIC]

(Sister Virginia U. Jensen, October 1998, General Relief Society Meeting)

We are all familiar with the life and work of the late Mother Teresa, who spent most of her life laboring among the world's poor and impoverished and did much to relieve sorrow and suffering. Once when she was in Australia, she offered to clean the hut of a lonely Aborigine man. In his hut was a beautiful but unlit lamp. When asked why he didn't light it, he replied, "Nobody comes here." She made him promise that he would light the lamp, and she promised to have the sisters visit him. Later the man sent word to Mother Teresa: "Tell my friend, the light she lit in my life is still burning!"

As Relief Society sisters we can bring light into the lives of those we serve along with the loaves of bread we bake and the casseroles we share. We can give hope, we can lift, and we can inspire. We can teach of Christ and help others find peace and comfort within His light. As women, we have natural tendencies to love and nourish. Women teach children, bolster friends, encourage husbands, and cheer on the disheartened. Women are givers of life and nurturers of the living. Every one of us has something to give, something to share, and someone to serve. As the second president of the Relief Society, Eliza R. Snow, declared, "There is no sister so isolated . . . her sphere so narrow but what she can do a great deal towards establishing the Kingdom of God upon the earth."

[BEGIN MUSIC]

NARRATOR: May we all learn the joy of service to others. When we serve others, both the giver and receiver benefit. This has been “Stories from the General Relief Society Meetings” on the topic of service. Thank you for listening to the Mormon Channel. For more information go to radio.lds.org and tell your friends about us.

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