

Episode 6

Stories from General Relief Society Meetings

TEACHING

NARRATOR: President David O. McKay said, ‘no greater responsibility can rest upon any man than to be a teacher of God’s children.’ Welcome to Stories from General Relief Society meetings. Today’s stories are on the importance of teaching. We’ll start with President Gordon B. Hinckley. In the 2002 general relief society meeting he tells us about a family that placed great value on education.

(President Gordon B. Hinckley, October 2000 General Relief Society Meeting)

With fascination I watched one evening on television the story of a family in the Midwest. It included the father and mother and three sons and one daughter. The father and mother determined when they married that they would do all they could to see that their children were exposed to the very best educational experiences.

They lived in a modest home. They observed modest ways. But they nurtured their children with knowledge. Every one of those children achieved in a remarkable way. Everyone was well educated. One became a university president; the others became heads of large business institutions, successful individuals by any measure.

NARRATOR: Along with getting a good secular education, children also need a Gospel education for spiritual survival. Modern prophets have said that the best place to teach the Gospel is in the home. Effective parents look for opportunities to teach Gospel principles. In the next story from the 2003 General Relief Society meeting, Sister Anne C. Pingree tells a personal account of a visit to a home in Japan that reflected the parents efforts in teaching the gospel.

(Anne C. Pingree, October 2003 General Relief Society Meeting)

While we were on an assignment in Japan, a Church leader invited us to visit his home. We were honored to have this opportunity but wondered what his wife would think of her husband's last-minute invitation to bring visitors from Salt Lake City home. En route, the man telephoned his wife, giving her what seemed to me about 15 minutes to prepare for this unexpected company.

From the moment we stepped inside the front door, slipped off our shoes, and were graciously greeted by a young, soft-spoken Relief Society sister, I sensed a spirit of order, peace, and love. Little children scurried upstairs carrying their playthings. In this family of eight, with seven still living at home, it was clear what the family valued. Evidences of the Lord were all around—pictures of the Savior on the wall, a family photograph and picture of the temple in a prominent place, copies of well-used scriptures and Church videos neatly stacked on a nearby shelf. "The fruit of the Spirit, . . . love, joy, peace, . . . gentleness, goodness, faith," seemed to reside in that home. I imagined the small room filled with children of all ages as parents sat around the low table to "talk of Christ, [to] rejoice in Christ, [to] preach of Christ, [to] prophesy of Christ, . . . that [their] children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins." I sensed the answer the children in this home would give to the question posed by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland: "Do [our] children know that we love God with all our heart and that we long to see the face—and fall at the feet—of His Only Begotten Son?"⁷ I believe the response to that question in this Japanese home would be a resounding *yes!*

NARRATOR: This Japanese couple knew the importance of having a Christ centered home. As we make our homes a place of love and learning, the spirit will be felt, even by visitors. There are many ways to teach, spoken and unspoken. From the 1999 General Relief Society meeting, Sister Virginia U. Jensen shares the story of a lost girl comforted by a mere picture in a strangers home.

(Virginia U. Jensen, October 1999 General Relief Society Meeting)

Recently my friend Richard came home from work to find a very small girl sitting on the curb in front of his house, crying. He asked if he could help. Through her sobs she explained that she was lost. He told her that this was his house and his wife was inside. He told her he knew she shouldn't go with strangers, but if she felt comfortable going inside, he and his wife would try to find her home. They went into his house, and his wife, Linda, began to console the little girl. "I'm sure you must be very frightened," she said.

"I was frightened," the girl responded, "until I saw the picture of Jesus hanging on your wall. Then I knew I would be safe."

Throughout the world, many of God's children are lost. We who know the truth can help them. We can show them a pattern of strong homes and righteous family members. We can help them if we have the Savior in our homes--not just His picture on the wall but also His teachings, His Spirit, and His love. Despite the instincts we have been blessed with, this kind of home doesn't happen automatically. We need spiritual strength and practical skills to build a home where the Spirit of the Lord is present. Home, Family, and Personal Enrichment meeting is a place for us to share sisterhood, to gain knowledge, to learn skills, and to increase testimony. This meeting is also the place to rededicate ourselves to our homes and families and to the giving of service wherever it is needed.

NARRATOR: In Mosiah chapter four, King Benjamin instructs parents "ye will not suffer your children that they go hungry, or naked; neither will ye suffer that they transgress the laws of God, and fight and quarrel one with another, and serve the devil, who is the master of sin, or who is the evil spirit...he being an enemy to all righteousness. But ye will teach them to walk in the ways of truth and soberness; ye will teach them to love one another, and to serve one another."

In addition to teaching children love and service, parents also have a responsibility to warn them of spiritual dangers. Next, President Gordon B. Hinckley reminds us of a story that can be effective in teaching the dangers of Satan's deception. This is from the 2000 General Relief Society broadcast.

(President Gordon B. Hinckley, October 2000 General Relief Society Meeting)

I have never forgotten a story that Elder Robert Harbertson told at this Tabernacle pulpit. He spoke of an Indian boy who climbed a high mountain. It was cold up there. At his feet was a snake, a rattlesnake. The snake was cold and pleaded with the young man to pick it up and take it down where it was warmer.

The Indian boy listened to the enticings of the serpent. He gave in. He gathered it up into his arms and covered it with his shirt. He carried it down the mountain to where it was warm. He gently put it on the grass. When the snake was warm it raised its head and struck the boy with its poisonous fangs.

The boy cursed at the snake for striking him as an answer to his kindness. The snake replied, "You knew what I was when you picked me up" ("Restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood," *Ensign*, July 1989, 77).

Warn your children against those with poisonous fangs who will entice them, seduce them with easy talk, then injure and possibly destroy them.

NARRATOR: The world is full of Satan’s traps. The best defense we have against Satan’s power is a Gospel centered home where proper teaching can occur. In the 2000 General Relief Society meeting Sister Virginia U. Jensen compares an account from the Book of Mormon to creating places of security around us now.

(Virginia U. Jensen, October 2000 General Relief Society Meeting)

There is an exciting story in the Book of Mormon beginning in chapter 48 of Alma. It is a time of peril and commotion for the Nephite nation. Their enemies have sworn to defeat them and take them into bondage. Against what appears to be all odds, Captain Moroni must find a way to defend his people--to create places of security for them. He directs his people to dig deep ditches and build up huge banks of earth around the cities. Later he improves upon his earlier defenses by adding works of timber topped with a frame of pickets and eventually towers to overlook the pickets. So effective is his strategy that the Lamanite armies are astonished and rendered powerless, even though they greatly outnumber the Nephites. The Nephites are safe within their cities and repel the Lamanite attacks.

While his enemies gained power through fraud and deceit, Moroni empowered the Nephites by teaching them to be faithful to God (see Alma 48:7). How do we, like Captain Moroni, create places of security for those around us in these sometimes frightening and perilous times? We can begin by following the admonition found in 1 Timothy 4:12: "Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity."

NARRATOR: You’re listening to stories from the General Relief Society meetings on the topic of teaching. If “actions speak louder than words”, then demonstrating we believe the gospel is the best way to teach our children. They will notice as our actions reflect our belief in Christ and his Gospel. In the next story, Sister Virginia U. Jensen tells us how her mother taught her the Gospel. This is from the 1997 General Relief Society meeting.

(Virginia U. Jensen, October 1997 General Relief Society Meeting)

When I was 10 years old, I sat in a sacrament meeting and watched my beautiful mother as she stood at the pulpit and told of her experiences as a young missionary in the Southern States Mission. She likened bringing someone to baptism to the thrill of giving birth and bringing a new child into the world. She bore her testimony with strength and conviction. She didn't need to tell me that missionary work was important; her example said it all. She didn't need to tell me what a testimony was because I felt it that day as I heard her share hers with the ward and with me. There are people all around us who need the benefit of our good example. President Gordon B. Hinckley said, "The most persuasive gospel tract is the exemplary life of a faithful Latter-day Saint" ("Five Million Members--A Milestone and Not a Summit," ENSIGN, May 1982, 45).

NARRATOR: This next account is from Sister Bonnie D. Parkin. She tells us about a lady who knew that you’re never too old to teach others. This is from the 2005 General Relief Society broadcast.

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

In a Relief Society Sunday lesson in my ward, we were discussing what makes a good marriage. One sister, Lisa, said: "I probably shouldn't say anything because I'm divorced. But what keeps me going is my temple covenants." After the lesson, I asked some new young adult Relief Society sisters what in this lesson had connected to them. They said, "Lisa's comment impacted us most."

Now, my dear older sisters, I see God's image in your noble countenances. How your wisdom, patience, and experience have touched so many lives! My amazing mother-in-law, Mary, in her 90s used to say, "People think because I'm old I don't know anything." Let me tell you what she knew and what she did. While living in a senior residence, Mary asked the manager if they could use a room for church services. He told her no because the center was nondenominational. She refused to accept his answer! With some other senior sisters, Mary persisted until the company provided a room. Soon a branch was organized, and members were meeting each Sunday to partake of the sacrament and renew their covenants. Age is not a barrier to becoming an instrument in the hands of God.

There are countless ways to be instruments in God's hands. For example, be the kind of visiting teacher you've always wanted; ask a young single adult about what she likes to do rather than why she's not married; share instead of accumulate; carefully choose your dress, speech, and choice of entertainment; smile at your husband or child who knows they've caused frustration and heartache; put your arm around a young woman; teach in nursery with a happy heart; show by your attitude that you are finding joy in the journey. The Prophet Joseph said of such efforts, "If you live up to your privileges, the angels cannot be restrained from being your associates."

NARRATOR: This last story is from Sister Anne C. Pingree in the 2004 General Relief Society meeting. She tells us about a friend who was dealing with a lot of adversity, and became both a student and a teacher.

(Anne C. Pingree, October 2004 General Relief Society Meeting)

In the early spring mornings as the sun took a first peek over the mountains, Jan and I started walking together. As newly assigned visiting teaching partners, we were both young mothers with growing families and busy, demanding schedules.

Jan and her family were recent move-ins to our ward, and I wasn't sure what we would talk about. Struggling, out of breath, up and down the inclines of a nearby mountain road, we walked and talked day after day.

In the beginning, our conversations were lighthearted chatter about our husbands and children, their interests, and the schools in the area. Little by little we opened our hearts to one another, processing spiritual ideas and delving into our experiences to find the kernels of truth. It seemed as we worked to get our bodies in shape, we began to get our souls in shape. I loved this wonderful exertion.

I learned two unforgettable lessons from my journey with Jan that continue to enlighten my mind and fill my soul with joy. The first is that whatever the circumstances in your life, if you are spiritually prepared, there is no need to fear (see D&C 38:30).

Long after we began our walks together, I discovered that years earlier Jan had made choices which took her step-by-step away from the Church and down a path she now regretted. About the time our lives intersected, she had determined to put her life in order. The longing in her heart was to prepare herself so that she could be sealed to her husband and children in the temple. Hers was a single-minded yearning, as Nephi phrased it, "[to] be reconciled unto Christ, and enter into the narrow gate, and walk in the strait path which leads to life, and continue in the path until the end of the day of probation" (2 Nephi 33:9).

You might expect that once Jan had determined as earnestly as Lamoni's father in the Book of Mormon to "give away all [her] sins to know [the Lord]" (Alma 22:18), her journey would be smoothed. Such was not the case.

She was faced with some of life's most soul-wrenching trials. Jan was diagnosed with a brain tumor, her husband lost his job, then the family lost their home and their car.

Yet Jan's faith in Jesus Christ grew steadier as her way grew harder. As we trudged along together on our morning walks, I learned so much from Jan about how her faith in the Lord and daily spiritual preparation helped her conquer fear. She seemed to understand perfectly what President Gordon B. Hinckley has taught: "We would be wise to kneel before our God in supplication. He will help us. He will bless us. He will comfort and sustain us" (*Standing for Something* [2000], 178).

Although she was in the midst of terrible trials, it was obvious to me that Jan knew our prophet's words are true. She never stopped her personal spiritual preparation as she moved forward fearlessly a day at a time with a radiant sense of calmness in her life. Over the course of those early hours together, I literally watched "the morning [break], the shadows flee . . . [and] the dawning of a brighter day" ("The Morning Breaks," *Hymns*, no. 1) as Jan's repentance brought her a release from sins and then a deeply personal spiritual enlightenment.

I asked Jan how she had come to feel peace when her life was in such turmoil and things were collapsing all around her. I believe the words of a hymn capture best what she felt and subsequently shared with me about the power of the Atonement in her life:

*The Lord is my light; the Lord is my strength.
I know in his might I'll conquer at length.
My weakness in mercy he covers with pow'r,
And, walking by faith, I am blest ev'ry hour.*
("The Lord Is My Light," *Hymns*, no. 89)

Because of her abiding faith, the Lord's Atonement brought daily renewal to Jan. She submitted her will to the Lord *one prayer, one scripture, and one act of service* at a time.

Shortly before her death while she was in her 30s, I was among those gathered in the temple quietly rejoicing as she, her husband, and their children knelt at the altar and were sealed together for eternity.

The second unforgettable lesson that I learned from Jan is that when the sisters of Relief Society look "with an eye single to the glory of God" (D&C 4:5), they can experience rich spiritual insights and share deep spiritual strength together.

At the beginning of our walks, Jan and I weren't walking at the same pace. As our hearts became "knit together in unity and in love" (Mosiah 18:21), we walked increasingly in step with one another both physically and spiritually. We buoyed each other up with our testimonies, bore one another's burdens, strengthened and comforted one another as Relief Society sisters have always done.

Through my friendship with Jan I learned what a sacred kinship connects us as Relief Society sisters. Jan and I, like so many of you, grew from our assignment as visiting teaching partners into sisters and cherished friends. I testify that connections forged among covenant women in Relief Society can indeed *enlighten, enliven, and enrich* the journey of life because we can help each other learn how to put the Lord *first* in our *hearts* and in our *lives*. I know this because over 20 years ago, Jan helped me move closer to our Savior by the way she lived. She encouraged me to work beyond my own problems, to rejoice gratefully in the majesty of the Savior's Atonement for my sins, to look forward with faith to what each new day brings, and to relish deep spiritual relationships available only through Relief Society.

I still walk in the mornings every chance I get. I still pause to study the beauties of this earth and to thank Heavenly Father for the mission of our Savior Jesus Christ. I often recall with deep gratitude the spirit Jan brought to our walks because of her great desire to feel the Savior's redeeming love. Her love for the Lord flooded my heart then as fully as the rays of the rising sun continue to flood the land with light every morning.

NARRATOR: This has been “Stories from General Relief Society meetings” on the topic of teaching, here on the Mormon channel. For more information visit us online on radio.lds.org. Tell your friends so they can join us, too!