

Episode 7

Stories from General Relief Society Meetings

MOTHERHOOD

NARRATOR: Welcome to ‘Stories from the General Relief Society Meeting’ on the Mormon Channel. Today we’ll share with you a few stories about one of the most important callings on earth...motherhood. In the Family Proclamation to the World...the First Presidency states that “mothers are primarily responsible for the [nurturing] of their children”. President James E. Faust reads a letter in the 2002 broadcast from a mother who realized the divine nature of her calling, despite difficult circumstances.

(President James E. Faust, General Relief Society Meeting, October 2002)

I recently received a letter from the son of a sister in this circumstance, and I quote a paragraph from it: "Mom was able to be a full-time homemaker while our family was young. This is where she wanted to be, but some 28 years ago, with four children ages 5 to 14, she was forced to take on employment outside the home in order to provide for us as a suddenly single parent. While we know this is not the ideal situation for raising a family, Mom worked diligently to continue nurturing us in the gospel and tending to all family duties while working full-time to support us financially. Only now as a parent myself, blessed to have my wife at home to care for our children, have I begun to understand the scope of Mom's situation and trials in caring for us at that time. It was difficult and trying and I wish that I had done more to make things easier for her. I will be eternally grateful for her sacrifice in setting an example by teaching us how to work and how we should live. The wisdom of the proclamation on the family rings especially true to me now because of the experiences we shared as a family."

Many faithful, righteous sisters have not had the opportunity for marriage, yet they have always been a vital and necessary part of this sacred work. These wonderful women have a distinct errand of influence as angels of mercy to parents, sisters, brothers, nieces, and nephews, as well as other family members and friends. In the Church there are endless opportunities to love and nurture. The single sisters, who may have more time, serve so superbly well.

NARRATOR: Not all women have the chance to be mothers here on earth. But all women are needed to serve their brothers and sisters of the Gospel. In the 1997 meeting, Virginia U. Jensen gives some ideas on how women can serve all of Heavenly Father’s children.

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

On a Monday evening not long ago, I was walking past a playground where a young family was choosing up sides for a game. I overheard one of the children call out, "Mom, choose me." As I walked on, these words rang in my ears. Life in today's world places a multitude of demands on a woman's resources of time and energy. We can choose to apply our talents in more arenas than ever before, but there are only a few of those places in which our influence is irreplaceable. I can imagine children the world over saying, "When you decide where to spend the time and the gifts that God has given you, Mom, choose me." Then I thought of elderly grandmothers who might be lonely or too frail to enjoy going out alone saying, "Granddaughter, when you're looking for a friend to take to a movie or out to lunch, choose me." I thought of single mothers who might appreciate the chance to have their children be influenced by a righteous priesthood bearer saying, "Neighbor, when you're looking for someone to invite over for family home evening, choose me and mine." These choices, sisters,

create places of security not only for our own homes but for our neighborhoods, our wards, and our communities.

NARRATOR: Also in the 1997 meeting, President Thomas S. Monson tells us how his mother served others.

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

I learned many lessons from my mother. I must have been a very active boy, for Mother was always telling me, "Slow down, Tommy, slow down. You're on the verge of Saint Vitus' dance!" You know, I never did know what Saint Vitus' dance was. All I knew was that Mother said I was on the verge of it--and the way she spoke the words, I assumed it was a drastic ailment.

Since we lived just a block or two from the railroad tracks, frequently men, unemployed, without funds for food, would leave the train and come to our house for something to eat. Such men were always polite. They offered to do some work for the food. Indelibly imprinted on my mind is the picture of a gaunt and hungry man standing at our kitchen door, hat in hand, pleading for food. Mother would welcome such a visitor and would direct him to the kitchen sink to wash up while she prepared food for him to eat. She never skimmed on quality or quantity; the visitor ate exactly the same lunch as did my father. As he wolfed down the food, Mother took the opportunity to counsel him to return to his home and his family. When he left the table, he had been nourished physically and spiritually. These men never failed to say thank you. Tears in their eyes revealed ever so silently the gratitude of their hearts.

NARRATOR: Mothers today have a lot on their plate. With jobs, church callings, and housework, it's easy for them to feel overburdened. But in the 2001 meeting, Mary Ellen W. Smoot encourages mothers to put the most important things first.

(Mary Ellen W. Smoot, October 2001 General Relief Society Meeting)

Some years ago, in her parting words to the Relief Society sisters, Sister Belle Spafford said, "The average woman today, I believe, would do well to appraise her interests, evaluate the activities in which she is engaged, and then take steps to simplify her life, putting things of first importance first, placing emphasis where the rewards will be greatest and most enduring, and ridding herself of the less rewarding activities."

Sometimes it takes a traumatic event to help us understand things of first importance. A few weeks ago we experienced one of those dramatic events that changed our lives forever and helped us realize the need to be prepared. The most frequent sentiment expressed by those directly affected by the recent terrorist attacks on the eastern coast of the United States was that all they wanted was to have their family together again. I understand this reaction.

Earlier this year, I underwent a serious surgery and spent many days in the hospital. As I pondered my life and what I would report to the Lord if I were called home, I realized with absolute clarity that the family is one of the most important responsibilities we have. I knew my greatest joy would be to have my children, grandchildren, and future great-grandchildren remain firm, steadfast, and immovable in the gospel. In those lonely moments in a dark hospital room, I realized that what we do within the walls of our homes far outweighs the things we do outside of them.

NARRATOR: What the world views as a successful woman is so different than how Heavenly Father does. In the 2005 General Relief Society Meeting, Bonnie D. Parkin relates an example of this.

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

Kristen was finishing a graduate degree and had recently given birth to her second child. She felt the other graduates had accomplished so much more and was reluctant to attend the graduation dinner. Her fears were confirmed when, at the dinner, the students were asked to list their professional accomplishments. Kristen recalled: "I suddenly felt embarrassed and ashamed. I had nothing to call myself, no lofty position, no impressive job title." To make matters worse, the professor read the lists as he presented a diploma to each student. The woman ahead of Kristen had many accomplishments: she already had a PhD, was receiving a second master's degree, and she'd even been a mayor! The woman received grand applause.

Then it was Kristen's turn. She handed the professor her blank sheet, trying to hold back the tears. The professor had been one of her teachers and had praised her performance. He looked at her blank paper. Without missing a beat he announced, "Kristen holds the most critical role in all of society." He was quiet for a few seconds, then declared in a powerful voice, "She is the mother of her children." Instead of a few courteous claps, people rose to their feet. There was just one standing ovation that night; it was for the mother in the room.

Mothers, you are instruments in God's hands, with a divine responsibility to teach and nurture your children. Little ones so need your kind and loving hand. As you put them first, He will direct you how to best serve them.

NARRATOR: Mothers should never feel discouraged that the daily tasks are of no real value. The work that mothers do is of eternal value. In the 2006 General Relief Society Meeting, Bonnie D. Parkin tells us about a mother's simple advice that had a lasting impact on her daughter.

(Bonnie D. Parkin, October 2006, General Relief Society Meeting)

A mother who knows her relationship with God helps her children to know Him and to be encircled by His love. I was touched by the comments a daughter shared at the funeral of her 100-year-old mother: "When I was a teenager trying to plan my class schedule, I would come into the kitchen where Mother was ironing. I would present possible options for my studies. . . . She would listen to all of them. We would discuss the possibilities . . . and then she would say, 'OK, Cathy, have you prayed about it?' That was kind of embarrassing to me, and I would hesitate and then add, 'Do you have to pray about everything?' She answered simply, 'I do'."

This mother listened. She shared her faith in the Lord; she set an example; she shared her expectations for her daughter to return continually to the Lord. As we approach the Lord, we feel His love draw us closer. Mothers, teach your children to always include the Lord in their lives, and help them to recognize His loving influence.

NARRATOR: You're listening to stories from the General Relief Society Meeting on the topic of motherhood. Virginia U. Jensen tells us how grateful she is to be a mother in the 2001 meeting.

(Virginia U. Jensen, October 2001 General Relief Society Meeting)

My youngest daughter and her husband spent several years earnestly seeking the best medical direction and the latest scientific assistance to have a baby. They fasted, they prayed, they hoped.

At last the long-desired result was achieved, and she is expecting their first child. Recently, the doctor scheduled an intensive examination to determine the soundness of the pregnancy. My daughter approached the exam with much anxiety. As the appointed day drew near, she found that her husband could not accompany her, and she asked if I would go with her. She said, "Mom, after all we've been through, if anything is wrong, I am going to need someone with me."

I was delighted to get a preview peek at someone I am going to love and treasure through eternity. I wanted to reassure her that everything was all right, but in my heart I too worried.

After the doctor reviewed the technician's video, he came in to discuss the findings with us. His first words were, "I wish every baby could look this perfect!" I could hardly contain myself. As we got to our car, I could not hold back my feelings any longer and I began to cry. So many feelings just came spilling out. I wept, wishing every expectant mother could hear those words. I cried for every woman who wanted to have a baby but couldn't. Tears flowed for all the women who want children but have not found a husband. Finally, I shed tears of gratitude with an overwhelming desire that our family will provide a home worthy of this baby....

Our homes here are sacred because of their connection to our Heavenly Father and our heavenly home. My experience with my daughter brought into clear focus once again the priority and vital importance of home and family. It also reminded me that as women with natural tendencies to love, nurture, and teach, we are called to protect and bless all who comprise our family. As He sends babies to this earth, the Lord needs us, whatever our circumstance may be, to stand strong and unwavering and to continue to create homes that are a fortress against a rising tide of evil. It is our charge to be the defenders of the home and family wherever we may find ourselves on this earth.

NARRATOR: Also in the 2001 meeting, Sheri Dew tells us how her mother protected her physically...and spiritually.

(Sheri L. Dew, October 2001 General Relief Society Meeting)

When I was growing up, it was not uncommon for Mother to wake me in the middle of the night and say, "Sheri, take your pillow and go downstairs." I knew what that meant. It meant a tornado was coming, and I was instantly afraid. But then Mother would say, "Sheri, everything will be OK." Her words always calmed me. Today, decades later, when life seems overwhelming or frightening, I call Mother and wait for her to say, "Everything will be OK."

Recent horrifying events in the United States have underscored the fact that we live in a world of uncertainty. Never has there been a greater need for righteous mothers—mothers who bless their children with a sense of safety, security, and confidence about the future, mothers who teach their children where to find peace and truth and that the power of Jesus Christ is always stronger than the power of the adversary. Every time we build the faith or reinforce the nobility of a young woman or man, every time we love or lead anyone even one small step along the path, we are true to our endowment and calling as mothers and in the process we build the kingdom of God. No woman who understands the gospel would ever think that any other work is more important or would ever say, "I am *just* a mother," for mothers heal the souls of men.

NARRATOR: Heavenly Father gives all women natural instincts to protect and nurture children. In that same talk, Sheri Dew tells how she used her motherly instincts to protect her nieces.

(Sheri L. Dew, October 2001 General Relief Society Meeting)

This summer four teenage nieces and I shared a tense Sunday evening when we set out walking from a downtown hotel in a city we were visiting to a nearby chapel where I was to speak. I had made that walk many times, but that evening we suddenly found ourselves engulfed by an enormous mob of drunken parade-goers. It was no place for four teenage girls, or their aunt, I might add. But with the streets closed to traffic, we had no choice but to keep walking. Over the din, I shouted to the girls, "Stay right with me." As we maneuvered through the crush of humanity, the only thing on my mind was my nieces' safety.

Thankfully, we finally made it to the chapel. But for one unnerving hour, I better understood how mothers who forgo their own safety to protect a child must feel. My siblings had entrusted me with their daughters, whom I love, and I would have done anything to lead them to safety. Likewise, our Father has entrusted us as women with His children, and He has asked us to love them and help lead them safely past the dangers of mortality back home.

Loving and leading—these words summarize not only the all-consuming work of the Father and the Son, but the essence of our labor, for our work is to help the Lord with His work.

NARRATOR: Virginia U. Jensen learned about these divine motherly instincts this from watching two birds' nests in her yard. This is also from 2001.

(Virginia U. Jensen, October 2001 General Relief Society Meeting)

This past spring two different bird families built nests in my yard. A small sparrow chose a rose tree on my patio for her nest. Time after time she flew back and forth, carrying blades of grass and small twigs in her beak. Carefully she manipulated her way through the rose thorns, depositing her building materials in the chosen spot. She worked without resting until the tiny nest was finished. I was amazed at how carefully the grasses were woven to make a strong and stable structure. I was almost moved to tears when I saw in the bottom of the nest four small pieces of cotton, placed in just the right spot to make a soft bed for her little ones.

The second bird, a robin, chose to build her nest in front of my house near the rain gutter, up high where ground predators could not reach it. Since she was larger, so was her nest, and in addition to being bigger, the outside of her nest was glued with mud, which kept the grasses and twigs together and held it in the crook of the rain gutter. Inside, single blades of grass were woven into a soft, cuplike shape that perfectly cradled the bird.

When the nests were completed, both birds laid their eggs and began the daily vigil of protecting and nurturing. Hour after hour, day after day these birds sat on their eggs. After the eggs hatched, the mothers worked full time to feed their hungry babies.

One particularly hot day I noticed the robin sitting on her nest, panting with her beak open. Obviously she was uncomfortable in the glare of the sun. I wondered why she stayed. Then I realized she was not sitting deep in the nest as she had when she was keeping her babies warm. Instead she was carefully stretched over the top of the nest, forming a protective shelter to keep her featherless babies from being sunburned.

I began to read about birds and the great pains they take to build homes for their families. Did you know that barn swallows make more than 1,200 mud-carrying trips in order to construct their nests? One single nest of a hooded oriole was found to contain 3,387 separate pieces of material. It seems to me that birds invest everything--their time, their energy, their means, their own comfort--to make a home and rear their young. It is not a priority that is given second place or avoided. It takes first place.

Since watching the birds in my yard, I have wondered who taught these birds what to do. How did they know how to build a nest and to shade their fledglings from the sun? Birds follow instincts to provide, protect, and nurture. These are God-given instincts, and pondering on them caused me, along with the Psalmist, to exclaim, "O Lord, how great are thy works!" (Ps. 92:5).

We are also blessed with God-given instincts. We instinctively want so much for those we love, and yet being human, we encounter many more problems than the birds I observed. In today's society there are many who challenge the importance of the traditional home and family. Some think there are other uses of a woman's time

and talents that are more important than the family. But prophets have been relentless in declaring that the role of homemaker is one of the most sacred and meaningful pursuits possible to man or woman. Sisters in all life circumstances have opportunities to build and nurture others within their sphere of influence. As you and I learn more about Heavenly Father's plan of salvation, we are assured that no matter the circumstances of our individual lives, creating a safe and nurturing environment for those we love is of the utmost importance.

NARRATOR: The plan of salvation really puts the importance of raising a family into perspective. President James E. Faust shares an experience of a woman who learned what a blessing it is to have families sealed together.

(President James E. Faust, October 1999 General Relief Society Meeting)

A few years ago, after attending the temple for the first time, a sister wrote:

"What a glorious blessing to be inside that house! My eyes, ears, and heart opened wide to absorb its teachings. I felt the reality of each covenant I made within every fiber and bone of my body. I felt I was standing right in front of the Lord each time I made covenants with him. The influence of the Lord was so great that I had no desire to leave the temple after the session was over. It became real to me then that I was surely in the world but not of it."

Four weeks later, she went through the temple on behalf of her mother and wrote:

"This was another glorious experience. I felt my mother's presence as I went through the endowment session, and when the marriage sealing was performed for my parents, I literally felt their presence at the altar. The influence of the Holy Spirit in the room was so strong that I broke down in tears while being sealed to my parents. I truly experienced a reunion with them. Ever since that day I have felt their presence so close that it doesn't seem real that they are gone."

As stated in the Relief Society declaration, you are beloved spirit daughters of God. In addition, in a revelation given through the Prophet Joseph Smith, we are told that "all those who receive my gospel are sons and daughters in my kingdom." And as daughters in His kingdom, you can be partakers of all gospel blessings.

NARRATOR: In the August 2004 Ensign, President James E. Faust also states that: "the influence of a mother in the lives of her children is beyond calculation. The family relationship of father, mother, and child is the oldest and most enduring institution in the world."

Teaching children simple gospel principles in the home prepares them to go to the temple and eventually live in heavenly father's kingdom. Nothing a woman can do is more important.

This episode of "Stories from General Relief Society Meeting" has been on the topic of motherhood. This is the Mormon Channel. To learn more, go to radio.lds.org.