

2006 FSA CONFERENCE
Address by: Sister Ardith Kapp
August 5, 2006

I feel very humble as I share thought with you today. I pray that the spirit will carry the message of Hope and Peace. Sometimes words are enemies to your thoughts; because it is difficult express your feelings about sacred and important matters, but if the spirit is present, the message gets through. Where there is help, there is hope.

I remember teaching a 4th grade class long division. I kept trying to teach it with different approaches. "I've got it, I've got it! I'm not dumb after all. Finally you said it right." I pray that my message guided by the spirit will give you hope and peace.

LDS Family Services August 5, 2006

Today we meet in a common bond as brothers and sisters, member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. As member of the Church in our growing-up years we lived with expectations and anticipations of a happy marriage, adorable, faithful children, and perfect grandchildren and to live happily ever after. Today we come together in what might be identified as unfulfilled expectations, with blessings delayed though not denied when we choose to do our part. Pray for the spirit to speak to each of you individually as we share feelings of frustration, hope and faith.

The scriptures teach that "...men are that they might have joy." (2 Nephi 2:25) Can there possibly be joy without children in an LDS family? It is important to know that a sealing in the temple as husband and wife as eternal companions is the beginning of a family. The family expands as children are added to their eternal relationships.

We read in the Proclamation on the Family that "...marriage is ordained of God and the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children." This clearly defines the Creators plan and the importance of children.

Planted deep within the heart of every woman of God is a yearning desire to become a mother. Every righteous man awaits the title of Father and the assurance that the family name will be passed from one generation to the next, time and time again. In the Encyclopedia of Mormonism we read, "For Latter-day Saints, the concept of eternal family is more than a firm belief, it governs their way of life. It is the eternal plan of life, stretching from life before through life beyond mortality (Vol 1, p. 961)

I realize many of you in this gathering have been blessed to expand your family through adoption but have a burning righteous desire to add at least one and hopefully more to your posterity. I pray that my message will relate to those who:

- have adopted and are praying for additional children
- are waiting hopefully and prayerful for that glorious day when you receive the call that you can come and pick up your precious baby
- are struggling with heavy decisions
 - about medical services and cost
 - council from loved ones
 - seeing eye to eye as husband and wife
 - finally, the Lord's will concerning you

Fortunately, the Church has come a long way in more recent years to encourage, guide and bless matters relating to adoption.

The Challenge

Brothers and sisters, we face a challenge that is real. How do we fit in, or do we? Is it even possible in a Mormon culture where everything that has lasting value ties to our families? Can we find joy in this life while we wait upon the Lord for blessings delayed? Could we ever find ourselves focusing so much on what we don't have that we sacrifice the blessing that we do have or can have with our eternal companion?

I speak with authenticity when I say my husband and I have some idea about what you feel. I draw from a lifetime of experience observing mothers with precious babes in arms, preschool children, missionaries, graduations, brides, grooms, grandchildren, Christmas cards of friends, yes, and a Mother's Day commemoration every year. But through it all I testify that life has meaning and purpose and direction with or without children, and we can experience joy, inexpressible joy, with feelings of gratitude and thanksgiving.

And how is this to be as we learn to wait upon the Lord?

First, we must accept the reality that this life is not intended to be free of struggle. In fact, it is through struggle that we are given opportunities to fulfill the very purpose of this mortal life. It is the fiery trials of mortality that will either consume us or refine us.

Part of those trials or challenges is facing alternatives and making decisions. For those of us without children, the choices may seem incredibly difficult to make. What would the Lord have us do? To what extent do we seek medical attention? What about adoption and foster children? What about no children-and if that is the choice, then what do we do with our lives? The choices are never simple. During these times of searching, we often find ourselves caught between conflicting counsel from parents and friends and leaders and doctors and other experts. Some couples I have known even consider divorce, each one thinking the other is responsible. Facing disappointments together can either strengthen or test your relationship as men and women see things from different points of view until you come in unity before the Lord. Takes time-I didn't find him like that.

My husband and I understand and remember some of the pains and much of the suffering that we endured. We remember the emotional highs and lows with every month, including the fast and testimony meetings when testimonies were borne by those who asked in faith and were blessed with children. We know how it is to return home and put two dinner plates on the table and to recall the marriage covenant to multiply and replenish the earth, and to desire desperately to qualify for that honor in righteousness. We know how it is to not be able to explain our feelings to each other, much less to family and friends, and how one's whole soul cries out as did Job, "If I be righteous,...I am full of confusion; therefore see thou mine affliction." (Job 10:15)

Some go through the suffering and concerns of childlessness year after year until finally they may even say, "My soul is weary of ... life" (Job 10:1), thinking that if they have no children, they cannot fill the measure of their creation. And if they don't fill the measure of their creation, they may say to themselves, "What else matters?"

I will forever remember the day a child new to our neighborhood knocked on our door and asked if our children could come out to play. I explained to him, as to others young and old, for the thousandth time, that we didn't have any children. This little boy

squinted his eyes in a quizzical look and asked the question I had not dared put into words, “If you are not a mother, then what are you?”

Our Identity

To the little boy I might answer, “I’m your friend,” to others I might say, “A righteous problem-solving woman of faith.” To myself I say with deep conviction, “I am striving to become a mother in Israel.”

“In 1916 the *Relief Society Magazine* published a series of articles entitled ‘Mothers in Israel.’ One prominent woman honored was Eliza R. Snow. Though childless, she was called a ‘mother of mothers in Israel’ and praised for her leadership among women, for her intelligence, and for her faithful support of the Church and its leaders...

“Currently the term [“mother in Israel”] is most often found in patriarchal blessings when a woman is promised in substance that she will stand “as a mother in Israel.” President Joseph Fielding Smith said, “To be a mother in Israel in the full gospel sense is the highest reward that can come into the life of a woman.” It is a promise open to all faithful sisters who love and serve the Lord and keep his commandments, including those who do not have the opportunity to bear children in this life...

“The prophets of this dispensation have consistently stressed the importance of committed motherhood both by those who bear and those who are and have counseled that this is a divinely given role important to the salvation and exaltation of God’s children (*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, p.964).

There are Eliza R. Snows among us here today. Those of you who, though temporarily without children, are contributing in a very significant way are helping to bring eternal life to others through your selfless service.

You and I can identify with the words of the Hymn *O My Father*, written by Eliza R. Snow:

“Then at length when I’ve completed
All you sent me forth to do.
With your mutual approbation
Let me come and dwell with you.” (*Hymns*, #292)

Finding Peace

I have come to know that we can all rejoice in the sacred calling of motherhood. To give birth is only one part of this sacred mission, the miracle of life. But to help another gain eternal life is a privilege that is neither denied nor delayed for any worthy woman. And to be a mother in Israel is with reach of every righteous woman even now.

Motherhood is a holy calling, a sacred mission for carrying out the Lord’s plan, that of nurturing the body, mind, and spirit of each of those who kept their first estate and came to earth to be proven in their second estate, “to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them.” (Abraham 3:25). The fate of each spirit in the eternities to come depends so much on the training it received by those who honor motherhood and that sacred trust.

From my own experience, I’ve learned that the only lasting peace is the peace that comes when we learn the Lord’s will concerning our opportunities in life. To do that, we must consider our alternatives, formulate a decision, and in unity take it to the Lord. Then, as President Dallin Oaks observed when he was president of Brigham Young University, “When a choice will make a difference in our lives-...and where we are

living in tune with the Spirit and seeking his guidance, we can be sure we will receive the guidance to attain our goal. The Lord will not leave us unassisted when a choice is important to our eternal welfare.” (*Brigham Young University 1982-82 Fireside and Devotional Speeches* [Provo: University Publications, 1982], p.26) I believe that. We just don't know the Lord's time line, and that is where our faith comes in.

While we wait upon the Lord for blessings delayed we must not be found waiting to be involved in rich and meaningful experience. Life is far too short.

Tried and Tested

Of all the insights gained from years of experience that I would hope to share with you, it would be to impress upon your minds and your hearts the importance of protecting, preserving and cherishing your relationship, your marriage covenant, your love for each other.

- One you must face reality-how far do we go seeking medical help
- What about adoption? A maybe decision

A relationship is tried and tested in times of disappointment, discouragement, and maybe even despair. But when we link arms and tread the way to God, hand in hand, the valleys that we traverse together can bring us to the mountain peaks. Marriage relationships are tempered and welded in times of adversity. Volumes have been written on the process of building strong relationships, but experience tells us that success depends not so much on a formula that we follow as on a commitment to each other that we feel. With that commitment, we work through the barriers that could be destructive and use them as bonds to strengthen, stabilize, and weld heart to heart, and soul to soul. Then privately we go about our secret ways to bring joy to each other.

I have two younger sisters, both of who are mothers. My youngest sister, Shirley, has eleven children. Sharon, another sister, has a daughter Shelly, who was born to her after six years of waiting. Ten years later, through the fervent prayers of the extended family for the wonderful blessing of adoption, a little boy came into their family and was sealed to them in the temple for time and eternity. What a blessing he and the other children have been to all of us!

Over the years, my sisters and I, with our husbands, have prayed for each other and with each other and about each other. We have come to know that the Lord has answered our prayers differently and not always in the affirmative and not always according to our time line. But we have all felt the warm assurance of His approval and love.

There will be times when we may feel that our desires are righteous, but the answer is still no. At that point, the only way to peace is to say, “Not my will but thine be done.” The Lord doesn't have to explain His decisions to us. If He did, how would we learn faith? I have learned that we must make our choices-even the hard ones-and then accept responsibility for the consequences. It is in facing the awesome responsibility of using our agency and, in faith, making decisions of great eternal consequence that we are drawn close to God, and we learn to listen and to follow the prompting of the spirit.

Someday, maybe years after the trial of our faith, we will receive a witness that our decisions were right. (See Ether 12:6) But until then, those who try to live in tune with the promptings of the Spirit must exercise no small degree of faith and courage in following that Spirit.

What, then, are some of the decisions couples can make to lead fulfilled lives when the answer is that they will not have children in this life? One night, as my husband and I were reaching for that kindly light to lead us amid the encircling gloom, we read a statement from President David O. McKay: “The noblest aim in life is to strive...to make other lives...happier.” (*Conference Report*, April 1961, p.131.)

These words were like a beacon in the dark. They became a motto, a guiding light. That night, speaking, I think, by inspiration from the Lord, the patriarch of our family said to me, “You need not possess children to love the. Loving is not synonymous with possessing, and possessing is not necessarily loving. The world is filled with people to be loved, guided, taught, lifted, and inspired.” You are some of those people.

My husband and I knew that parents are constantly placed in situations that help them develop unselfishness and sacrifice. We began to realize that if we were to learn the important lessons that our friends with children were learning, we needed to place ourselves in situations where we could serve and sacrifice. So we began to say yes to everything and to everyone.

It wasn't long before we had many opportunities to serve and sacrifice. Often at the end of a long week we would plan for a moment together—just the two of us—and the telephone would ring. We'd postpone our moment together and carry on with joyful, grateful hearts for our opportunities, hoping to qualify even in some small measure for the quality spoken of by Elder Neal A. Maxwell: “So often our sisters [and I would add brothers] comfort others when their own needs are greater than those being comforted. That quality is like the generosity of Jesus on the cross. Empathy during agony is a portion of divinity! ... They do not withhold their blessings simply because some blessings are [for now, at least] withheld from them.” (*Ensign*, May 1978, pp.10-11)

Keep an Eternal Perspective

We who do not have children can wallow in self-pity—or we can experience “birth pains” as we struggle to open the passageway to eternal life for ourselves and others. I bear testimony that instead of wrapping our empty and aching arms around ourselves, we can reach out to others. As we do so, one day we can even be able to hold our friends' babies and rejoice. We can rejoice with the mother or a new bride, and the mother of a newly called missionary, and even with our friends the day they become grandmothers. How can that be? Let me tell you.

We were alone with each other at a motel in St. George, Utah, one Thanksgiving time when all our relatives were with their families. Early in the morning I lay in bed thinking. I remember my heart crying out as I anticipated Christmas approaching. And although we could share in the joy and excitement of our nieces and nephews, it wasn't like having our own children with stockings to hang. The whole thing seemed to me to be unfair. I felt darkness and despondency settle over me, and I did what I had learned to do over the years. I got on my knees and prayed for insight.

My answer came when I opened the scriptures to Doctrine and Covenants 88:67-68. “And if your eye be single to my glory [and remember, God's glory is to help ‘to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man’ (Moses 1:39), your whole body shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you; and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things. Therefore, sanctify yourselves that your minds become single to God, and the days will come that ye shall see him; for he will unveil his

face unto you, and it shall be in his own time, and in his own way, and according to his own will.”

I don’t know how long it will be for others who have similar longings. For us it was years. But one day we did gain an eternal perspective, and we felt peace, not pain; hope, not despair. I would have liked so much to have received that insight years before, but I know that had that happened, I would have been deprived of the growth that comes from being comforted by the witness of the Spirit after the trial of my faith and for many of the opportunities.

If I have any comforting message for others, it is this: Peace of mind comes from keeping an eternal perspective. Motherhood, I believe, is a foreordained mission. For some, this glorious blessing may be delayed, but it will not be denied. Motherhood is an eternal reality for all women who live righteously and accept the teachings of the gospel.

On the other hand, the characteristics of motherhood, which include concern for others, sacrifice, service, compassion, teaching, encouraging, and inspiring, can be the noble labor for each of us now, with or without children. The fate of each spirit in the eternities to come depends so much on the training it receives from those here and now who are willing to help another gain eternal life.

To participate in this glorious work gives meaning and purpose, great joy, and eternal blessings each and every day, even as we anticipate the promises of the future.

If that does not give enough comfort, let me share this thought by President Brigham Young:

“Let me here say a word to console the feelings...of all who belong to this Church. Many of the sisters grieve because they are not blessed with offspring. You will see the time when you will have millions of children around you. If you are faithful to your covenants, you will be mothers of nations...And when you have assisted in peopling one earth, there are millions of earths still in the course of creation. And when they have endured a thousand million times longer than this earth, it is only as it were the beginning of your creations. Be faithful, and if you are not blessed with children in this time, you will be hereafter.” (*Journal of Discourses* 8:208).

Now I admit that eternal perspective seems a far reach from our immediate concerns. The thought of one day having a million children doesn’t do much for your empty arms and aching heart, or the answer to the decisions you are called upon to face at this time. But I testify that you can have joy unspeakable here and eternal happiness hereafter as you follow the invitation of our Savior: “Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not.” (D&C 6:36)

It is my humble testimony, and I bear witness that this true and eternal perspective is better understood in the temple than anywhere else. It is in the temple that we are taught by the spirit and sense the reality of our eternal relationships through our temple covenants. It is in the temple that we are promised blessings for us and for our posterity. It is in the temple that we begin to understand the very purpose of life and receive a sure witness of the spirit that no blessing will be denied when we choose the path of obedience, with or without children during this life.

President Packer reminds us, “In the temple we face the sunlight of truth. The light of the temple, that understanding, shines upon us as does the light of the sun. And

the shadows...of disappointment and failure fall behind us. Nowhere quite equals the temple.”

In the past three years Brother Kapp and I have had the opportunity to spend much time in the temple. I have had my eyes opened and my understanding increased as never before. I have a deeper sense of the magnitude and the vastness and eternal nature of the ordinances and covenants available in the temple. It is through the covenants made in the temple we find our greatest source of light and knowledge and power. It is in the ordinances of the temple we begin to more fully comprehend the very purpose of this earthly journey and the great plan of happiness. We learn of our divine inheritance as a child of God and our potential as an eternal being. In the temple we learn more of the great plan of happiness and our reason of unwavering hope. We learn of the promise in relation to our covenants and we feel God’s binding love.

Our desire of course is to be a mother and a father with children to love. We do not want to ever lose that desire, but now looking back from a lifetime of experience I share with you steps I feel are essential to rising above the disappointment and looking forward with anticipation and joy and assurance and peace.

1. Accept what you cannot change.
2. Be united and bound together.
3. Make decisions with an eternal perspective.
4. Develop a plan to give meaning to life.
5. Trust in the Lord.
6. Don’t be offended by what others may say.
7. Open your arms and your hearts to others, especially children.
8. Know your identity independent of the mother or father role at the present time.
9. Desire to know the Lord’s will and carry it out.
10. Find that peace that “passeth all understanding” in the temple.

In the scriptures we read in the writings of Nephi, “And the Spirit said unto me: Behold what desirest thou?” (1 Nephi 11:2)

With the peace found in the temple our perspective is expanded. As the scriptures tell us, we “grow up” in the Lord (see D&C 109:15). I would suggest you make a list of the things you most desire, and then work to reach those goals and you will find yourself meaningful activity and totally involved. May I share with you from my list of desires that have added blessings to my life.

I desire to keep my covenants to the best of my ability, relying on the grace of God and the atonement.

I desire to know the Lord’s will concerning me, and to live in such a way as to be guided by the Holy Spirit in carrying it out.

I desire to be a loyal, true, loving helpmeet, to lift and build and strengthen, to encourage and support my husband as we strive together toward our exaltation.

I desire to develop charity, to see others as Christ would see them, to be non-judgmental and to reach out in love and kindness.

I desire to pray with real intent, having faith in Christ, so my prayers are truly a communication with my Father.

I desire to feast upon the words of Christ to know what I should do, to find answers and be worthy and able to teach and write to strengthen others.
I desire a grateful heart, to be mindful every day of the blessings of life as I ponder, “Why me, why here, why now,” and give eternal thanks.
I desire to fill the measure of my creation even without children.
I desire to keep the commandments so that I will be “encircled...in the arms of His love” and hear Him say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”
At the times when the test is greatest, turn to your scriptures, you “letters from home,” like a favorite letter that you read over and over for comfort and courage, acceptance and the deepest gratitude. I turn to Alma 7:11: “And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.” There I am reminded that He understands and has paid an enormous price for my happiness.

President Benson said, “I...recognize that not all women in the Church will have an opportunity for marriage and motherhood in mortality. But if those of you in this situation are worthy and endure faithfully, you can be assured of all blessings from a kind and loving Heavenly Father—and I emphasize all blessings.

“I assure you that if you have to wait even until the next life to be blessed with a choice companion, God will surely compensate you. Time is numbered only to man. God has your eternal perspective in mind” (“*To the Single Adult Sisters of the Church*,” Ensign, November 1988, p96).

“When faced with seemingly unfulfilled blessings, we can choose to live, as President Grant referred to it, “a useful life.”

“As we make the most of what we have, rather than pining after or mourning over what we do not have, we will discover that we have received numerous other blessings—blessing that were not specifically pronounced by a patriarch.

“And if each of us lives “a useful life,” remaining worthy and enduring faithfully, we can look forward to receiving all promised blessing.” (*Church News* March 4, 2006 p.16)

And finally I testify in the words of Helaman to his sons: “And now, my sons, 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 build they cannot fall.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.