

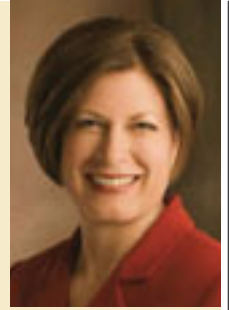


1 Increase Faith and Personal Righteousness.

The first-Sunday lesson gives us an opportunity to turn to the scriptures for the doctrines that will help us meet the challenges of the latter days.

By Julie B. Beck

Relief Society
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STUDYING THE WORK OF Relief Society

When our presidency was first called, we were given some resources about the history of the Relief Society, which had been collected over the years. We studied them prayerfully, wanting to know the purpose of Relief Society and what the Lord would have us do during our administration.

As we studied that history carefully, we learned that the purpose of Relief Society as established by the Lord is to organize, teach, and inspire His daughters to prepare them for the blessings of eternal life. Relief Society applies to all aspects of a Latter-day Saint woman's life. Sisters are taught and inspired through visiting teaching, service, and Relief Society meetings. Each Sunday our goal in Relief Society is to study the doctrine and principles that will help us achieve our purposes. As a result of our Sunday lessons, sisters should be able to live the gospel with greater conviction in their families and homes.

The First Sunday Is Different

On the second, third, and fourth Sundays of the month, we study *Gospel Principles* and teachings from general conference as a way to lead us to the blessings of eternal life. However, on the first Sunday of the month, a member of the Relief Society presidency instructs us and leads us in discussions as to how we can fulfill our sacred responsibilities as members of the Relief Society.

As Latter-day Saint women we have the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and testimonies of the plan of salvation. We are responsible for the female half of that plan. It cannot be delegated to others. We are accountable before the Lord for the discharge of our duties. And the first Sunday of the month is the Lord's gift of time to us as Relief Society sisters to learn how to fulfill our responsibilities.

I hope that we will use that gift of time to fulfill our three lifelong responsibilities as members of the Relief Society: (1) increase faith and personal righteousness, (2) strengthen families and homes, and (3) seek out and help those in need.

On the first Sunday of the month, the Relief Society presidency leads us in discussions on how we can fulfill our sacred responsibilities as Relief Society sisters.

2 Strengthen Families and Homes.

On the first Sunday of the month, we can learn how to uphold, nourish, and protect families.



STEP UP AND BE STRONG



“Some women have said that it is frightening to teach a class or speak in front of a group. I can assure you I know from experience that it can be rather intimidating. Let’s remember what Eliza R. Snow once said to her niece who was called upon to speak in front of a group. When her niece arose, she was unable to say anything because fear overcame her. She finally just sat down. Eliza kindly and gently advised her, ‘Never mind, but when you are asked to speak again, try and have something to say.’ . . .

“At a wonderful Relief Society meeting, Eliza R. Snow recorded in the minutes that ‘nearly all present arose and spoke, and the spirit of the Lord like a purifying stream, refreshed every heart.’ We hope our sisters today feel nourished, edified, and uplifted every time they attend a Sunday lesson.

“Sisters, now more than ever, we need

women to step up and be strong. We need women who declare the truth with strength, faith, and boldness. We need women to set an example of righteousness. We need women to be ‘anxiously engaged in a good cause’ (D&C 58:27). We need to live so that our lives bear witness that we love our Heavenly Father and the Savior Jesus Christ and that we will do what They have asked us to do. We need to rescue ‘all that is finest down deep inside of [us]’ so that as daughters of God we can do our part to build the kingdom of God. We will have help to do this. As Joseph declared, ‘If you live up to your privileges, the angels cannot be restrained from being your associates.’”

Barbara Thompson, second counselor in the Relief Society general presidency, “Now Let Us Rejoice,” *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2008, 115, 116.

I hope we will turn to the scriptures and approved Church resources for the examples, principles, and doctrines that will help us accomplish these responsibilities and learn how to meet the challenges of the latter days. Emma Hale Smith, our first Relief Society president, was told to “expound scriptures, and to exhort the church, according as it shall be given thee by my Spirit” (D&C 25:7). We can follow her example.

If I were to do this in a first-Sunday Relief Society meeting, I would begin by prayerfully deciding what we should be learning. I would then search the scriptures to discover what they have to teach us on that topic. I would learn what prophets and Church leaders have taught. Then I would pray for the Spirit’s guidance as I wrote down some discussion questions we could use as we study together in our first-Sunday meeting. I would hope that sisters would go home stronger and use this same pattern to study in their homes and teach their families.

Increasing Faith and Personal Righteousness

My grandmother, Isabelle Bawden Bangerter, was known to be a woman of great faith. She acquired her faith as a child and worked to increase it all her life. She taught Relief Society for many years, and among Relief Society sisters she was known as a theologian, a woman who knew the gospel well and could teach it from the scriptures. She was still studying the scriptures when she died at the age of 97. Grandma Bangerter was a woman who was confident in her eternal roles and responsibilities. When I was a young mother, I asked her if it was possible to rear a righteous posterity in a world filled with wickedness. She raised herself up, and pointing at me, she emphatically said, “Yes! You

must! That is why you are here!” Her teaching inspired me to become more intentional about my responsibilities and to approach life with greater faith. It is possible to have that kind of direct and inspired teaching every week in Relief Society.

Sisters frequently have questions about how to live through the experiences of this mortal life in a faith-filled way. The first Sunday of the month gives us the opportunity to bring together the combined faith that exists in each Relief Society. The wisdom of all present can help answer real questions and provide inspired answers.

Following are other examples of what we can study on the first Sunday to help us increase our faith and personal righteousness:

- Making and keeping covenants.
- Qualifying for a temple recommend and worshipping in temples.
- Qualifying for, recognizing, and following the influence of the Holy Ghost.
- Teaching and defending Jesus Christ’s gospel.
- Participating in sincere personal and family prayer.
- Having family home evening.
- Implementing principles of self-reliance and provident living.

Strengthening Families and Homes

When I was a young Relief Society sister, we had a mother-education class once a month. Though I had a wonderful and skilled mother, I still learned from my teachers in Relief Society how to be a better mother and how to improve my home. We learned home-making principles and skills, we learned how to be better parents, and we learned how to strengthen our marriages.



BLESSINGS OF THE TEMPLE

“Do whatever may be necessary to qualify to receive [the blessings of the temple]. . . .

“. . . Go to the temple to seal our families eternally. Let us return to the temple as often as our circumstances will permit. Let us give our kindred dead the opportunity to receive the ordinances of exaltation. Let us enjoy the spiritual strength and the revelation we receive as we attend the temple regularly. Let us be faithful and make and keep temple covenants to receive the full blessings of the Atonement.”

Silvia H. Allred, first counselor in the Relief Society general presidency, “Holy Temples, Sacred Covenants,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2008, 114.

3 Seek Out and Help Those in Need. We have the responsibility to provide relief—relief of poverty, illness, doubt, ignorance, and all that hinders the joy and progress of women.

Young mothers often ask me if we can ever have mother education again in Relief Society. My answer is yes. We can learn how to uphold, nourish, and protect families on the first Sunday of the month.

Following are some examples of what we can study on the first Sunday to help us strengthen families and homes:

- Understanding and defending the divine roles of women.
- Embracing the blessings of the priesthood.
- Forming eternal families.
- Maintaining strong marriages.
- Bearing and rearing children.
 - Expressing love for family members and nurturing them.
 - Accepting responsibility to prepare a

righteous rising generation of Latter-day Saints.

- Knowing, living, and defending the doctrine of the family.
- Searching out deceased family members and performing temple ordinances for them.

Seeking Out and Helping Those in Need

First-Sunday lessons are our opportunity to strengthen one another and find answers to life's difficulties. At any given time many of the sisters in each Relief Society are experiencing trials and disappointments. President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, has called each ward Relief Society a "circle of sisters." He said:

"Each sister, no matter where in that circle she stands, can look to either side and feel the spirit of inspiration coming back as she extends the



gentle hand of charity to those on either side. . . .

“ . . . You will serve your organization, your cause—the Relief Society—this great circle of sisters. Your every need shall be fulfilled, now, and in the eternities; every neglect will be erased; every abuse will be corrected. All of this can come to you, and come quickly, when you devote yourself to Relief Society.”¹

It has been my experience that each ward Relief Society has the capacity to give to one another the support that is needed. If we seek and receive the help of the Holy Ghost, all answers can be found in each circle of sisters.

We have the responsibility to provide relief—relief of poverty, illness, doubt, ignorance, and all that hinders the joy and progress of woman. Relief Society has always been engaged in providing relief to others.

We know that because we are living in the latter days, we as individuals and families are facing many difficult challenges. These challenges include abuse, addictions, apathy, debt, depression, disobedience, unemployment, family disintegration, illness, persecution, poverty, and violence. This sounds very much like what the Apostle Paul prophesied in 2 Timothy 3:1–7, 13. However, we need not be afraid. We have the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul also gave us the solution:

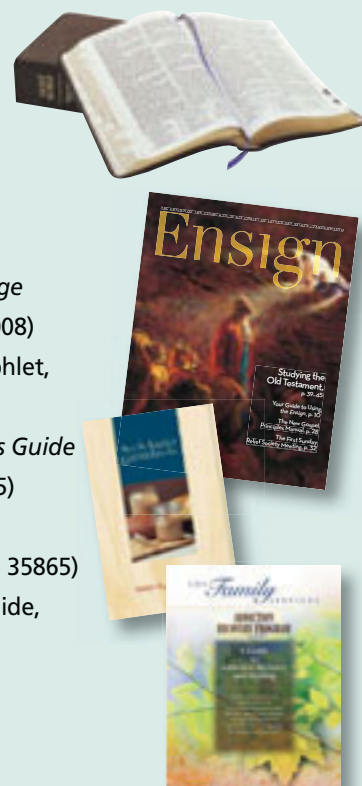
“But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them;

“And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:14–16).

RESOURCES FOR FIRST-SUNDAY LESSONS

- Scriptures
- Teachings of latter-day prophets
- The *Ensign* magazine
- *All Is Safely Gathered In: Family Finances and Family Home Storage* (pamphlets, item nos. 04007, 04008)
- *For the Strength of Youth* (pamphlet, item no. 36550)
- *Family Guidebook and A Parent's Guide* (booklets, item nos. 31180, 31125)
- *Marriage and Family Relations* (Sunday School manual, item no. 35865)
- *Preach My Gospel* (missionary guide, item no. 36617)



On the first Sunday, a member of the Relief Society presidency can personalize the work of Relief Society. She can focus on charitable works as solutions to specific ward or branch needs. She can train the sisters to be visiting teachers who address the needs of others as they find them. And when appropriate, she can make assignments to help specific people in need.

Using the First Sunday

I believe that as Relief Society leaders seek the help of the Holy Ghost, they will be inspired as to what to study and teach during the first-Sunday meeting of Relief Society. I know that the Lord's work will continue to go forth across the earth and that it will prosper in large part because the good women of the Church will do all they can to further that work in their own homes and families first and then in their other circles of friendship and acquaintance. ■

NOTE

1. Boyd K. Packer, “The Circle of Sisters,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, 109, 110.