

April 22

Latter-day Saint Women Podcast Transcript

Rebecca Mehr | How priesthood Power Offers Divine Help to Every Woman

SHALYN.

Hello, and welcome to the *Latter-day Saint Women* podcast, where we share the legacy of women of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. You'll get to know the faithful women who shaped our past and hear from inspiring women of faith today. I'm Shalyn Back.

KARLIE.

And I'm Karlie Guymon. We are your cohosts, and today we are very excited to welcome Rebecca Mehr to the studio as our guest. Rebecca, welcome.

REBECCA.

Thank you. Great to be here.

KARLIE.

We've been looking forward to this. Rebecca is a member of the general Relief Society council and actually serves as the chair of the Relief Society communication committee. So in that position she has been hugely supportive of the podcast, and we're so grateful to finally have her in the studio to have her share her testimony and experiences. As a brief introduction, Rebecca is such a delightful and capable woman.

SHALYN.

She is.

KARLIE.



She was raised in New York and Maryland in the United States and studied computer science at BYU. She worked as an engineer and marketing executive in the tech industry for several prominent and international companies and later brought those talents to work for the Church's History Department, which is really neat. She speaks French, she sang in The Tabernacle Choir, she's served in many significant Church callings—we really could go on and on. But we'll hear more about that today. We did want to mention she married Dan Mehr in 2007 after the death of his first wife, and so she's going to talk more about that experience of becoming kind of an instant mom and grandma to six children and many grandchildren and also share her early experience of divorce, which we really appreciate, as we know these experiences are things that many women experience in the Church. So, thank you so much for being here. We're excited to jump in and talk more today.

REBECCA.

Great.

SHALYN.

Yes, thank you. First, we would love to ask you about your service in the general Relief Society council. So, you've been in that position for almost four years, and, Rebecca, you've told us that throughout your service you've spent significant time and energy studying priesthood power and authority. And we want to know, Why have you spent so much time on this subject as a council?

REBECCA.

I love this question. It's really an important question. Maybe I can just frame it with a little experience I had several years ago as I was walking into a Sunday School class, a youth Sunday School class. The teacher walked in and announced, "OK, today's lesson is on the priesthood." And a young woman on the front row promptly threw her hands in the air and said, "I don't have to pay attention; this is for the boys."

KARLIE.

Great. I get the week off.

REBECCA.



Exactly. “I just can relax.” She laid across the chairs. Afterwards, I was so excited to talk to her, but that’s been our widespread misunderstanding, hasn’t it? It’s like, OK, that’s for the men.

KARLIE.

I think we relate to that story. Like, we can all think of times when as young women or maybe younger children or even older people—saying, “Ehhh, this isn’t about me.”

SHALYN.

It’s easy to tune out sometimes.

REBECCA.

How often do we metaphorically lay across the chairs ourselves? I, like Sister Bingham—and this was under her direction; we spent many hours studying the doctrine of priesthood and how that applies to women, and when you look at the vision of prophets for women, it’s expansive. Starting with Joseph Smith in the early days of the restored Church, he founded Relief Society for the purpose of preparing women to be endowed with priesthood power in the temple. And then, of course, we’ve talked so much about the prophecy of President Kimball in 1979—that’s been quoted often—that basically the female exemplars of the Church will be a significant force in both the numerical and the spiritual growth of the Church in the last days. And then, of course, President Nelson is repeating that and confirming that we are the women that he foresaw. So I think we’re kind of navigating this paradigm shift from, so to speak, laying on the chairs to stepping forward more than we ever have before. And in order to do that, we need to understand priesthood. And the doctrine hasn’t changed; we’re just understanding it better. So, I think if we can really understand how priesthood applies to women, we begin to understand what authority we actually do have. We see ourselves as accessing the power of God. We learn how critical we are in the work of the Church. We learn how to act in the name of Jesus Christ. And we discover by ourselves by actual experience that God wants to share His power with us as we do His work. And there’s nothing more joyful than to feel Him with us supporting us, strengthening us in all of our callings or all of our responsibilities, our covenant responsibilities.

SHALYN.

Definitely.



KARLIE.

So, kind of what you're hinting at is what really changes us is when we personally see that and feel that in our lives. So, you've spent time studying this; President Bingham and the council have counseled together on this topic. How has this changed you personally, this period of a paradigm shift?

REBECCA.

Yeah, I love all of these questions. We could spend many podcasts, I think, on this.

KARLIE.

We could.

REBECCA.

But just to pick one thing, we've always had access to priesthood power. I think we just haven't called it that. That hasn't been our language. So I think language is important, and it's important to be precise in what we're saying about priesthood. When we give instruction and we instruct stake leaders as members of the council, we always include a definition of three priesthood terms: priesthood authority, priesthood power, and priesthood keys. And I like to add a fourth, and that's priesthood office. So maybe we could go through that just really quickly.

SHALYN.

That would be great.

KARLIE.

Yes, that's a great foundation.

REBECCA.

So, priesthood keys—and again, this is so nutshell. There's so much more.

KARLIE.

Which is great, yeah.



REBECCA.

But just put it in a nutshell. priesthood keys, there really aren't that many key holders: stake presidents, bishops, quorum presidents, for example. But a key holder directs how priesthood is going to be used in his area of responsibility, so they delegate priesthood authority. So, priesthood authority—everyone who serves in the Church, man or woman, has priesthood authority. I love President Oaks' talk in 2014, which you'll remember, when he said, "[We're] not accustomed to speaking of women having the authority of the priesthood in their Church callings, but what other authority can it be?"

SHALYN.

Right.

REBECCA.

I love that. And then he went on to say women are given priesthood authority to perform a priesthood duty. And President Nelson uses similar words to talk about priesthood authority, that's our license or permission. So sisters are given priesthood authority in the form of a calling or an assignment. So you can think about a Relief Society president as having the priesthood authority to preside over the Relief Society sisters in her ward, or a Primary teacher has the authority to minister to and teach his children. Sometimes I hear a sister refer to her "keys," and that's not correct. But sisters have priesthood authority, and the brethren also receive authority in their callings and assignments, and, in addition, they're ordained to office. So if we talk about priesthood office, the office of a priesthood holder gives the priesthood holder the right to perform ordinances—

KARLIE.

OK.

REBECCA.

Such as baptism, the sacrament, or give blessings. And these ordinances for all of us—these are the words of Tad Callister—"unlock and unleash certain powers of godliness in [our lives] that are not available ... any other way." And that gets us to the glorious objective of



priesthood power. We all are given access to priesthood power. That's why we have priesthood keys, why we have priesthood authority, why we have priesthood office, so that every one of us can have access in our own lives to priesthood power.

SHALYN.

That's amazing.

KARLIE.

Thank you for sharing this, because I think the goal is that every woman could summarize what you just summarized. And I think we're a little—I'm a little timid. If someone asks you to define all of those words, I would feel a little bit like, "Oh, I don't know if I could do this totally accurately." But that's the foundation, right? And I do think we've come a long way in understanding and being able to define these terms.

REBECCA.

I think so, we're talking about a lot more, obviously. Our prophet has asked us—he entreats us to find all the truths about priesthood that we can. And it's become more a part of our conversation.

SHALYN.

And I really love those simple definitions. I feel like that could stick in my mind, just the simplicity of it. I know that you as the general Relief Society council have spent a lot of time studying this; you're training people on this. And we would love to know, Why, from your perspective, is it so important for women in the Church to understand the priesthood authority and power available to them as covenant-keeping women of God? I'm just wondering what this vision is. If everybody understood this, what would that look like?

REBECCA.

How would it be different? I've always loved Sheri Dew's quote "If we could unleash the full influence of covenant-keeping women, the kingdom of God ... would change overnight."

SHALYN.



Wow.

REBECCA.

Now, I had a great experience in the West Indies. My husband and I were mission leaders in the West Indies, and he was called to be the mission president in 2012. And if you'll recall, the age change happened in October 2012, and President Monson announced that.

KARLIE.

Oh, wow.

REBECCA.

Sisters could serve at 19. So when we arrived in the West Indies mission, we had a number of sister missionaries. They're fabulous, very faithful, very dedicated, consecrated sisters and just such great missionaries. Every time we got together, it seemed, I would get a question that sounded something like this: "How can I ever be as good a missionary as the elders?"

KARLIE.

Oh, that breaks my heart.

SHALYN.

Yeah.

REBECCA.

Doesn't that break your heart? And it broke mine. And the other question was "Do I really belong here? Am I supposed to be a missionary?" So we spent time talking about that. Then October 2012 came, the age change happened, and then we were flooded with these young 19-year-old sisters. I never got the question again.

KARLIE.

Wow.



REBECCA.

It never came up. And I look at that and think these 19-year-old sisters know. They were invited by a prophet of God. They were given priesthood authority to perform a priesthood duty, so they were completely—

KARLIE.

Confident.

REBECCA.

Confident.

SHALYN.

That's amazing.

REBECCA.

And that's where they were supposed to be. So I think in that example we see several things: that they're confident to do the work, they know they're invited, they embraced their stewardship, and then I loved seeing how these young elders and sisters just worked together naturally. And one other story: my husband and I served after this in the Provo MTC, and each district would almost always have at least one companionship of sisters. One day I was there with a district of all elders, and I asked one of the elders, "How do you feel about this? You don't have any sisters; most everybody else has." And I was fully expecting to have some sort of, kind of, young men, young women—they're just months out of high school.

SHALYN.

They are so young.

REBECCA.

They probably—

KARLIE.

And youth.



REBECCA.

Exactly.

KARLIE.

And youth program.

REBECCA.

They probably went to a dance maybe two weeks before. Who knows? And I was fully expecting him to have some sort of a response like that. And he looked at me and he said, “Sister Mehr, I am envious of the other districts, because I feel like they progress faster than we do without sister missionaries.” And I just marvel at how these young men and young women both are embracing their priesthood duties and doing it together. So I think this is another way that the kingdom of God will change overnight, that Sheri Dew is talking about as it will progress together.

KARLIE.

That’s exciting, that even for you in that calling in that time you saw the change in progress.

REBECCA.

Yeah, it was fascinating to watch. I think there’s kind of a lock step that has to happen. We as sisters need to do as President Nelson is inviting us and step forward more than we ever had before. And he talks about teaching and speaking and leading with priesthood power and priesthood authority. And as we step forward into that—and when he says “more than you ever have before,” that could kind of indicate maybe a little bit of discomfort, something new.

KARLIE.

Something new.

REBECCA.



But as we step forward and then the brethren also expand their leadership style to include more women in councils, both of those need to happen together.

KARLIE.

Yes.

REBECCA.

We grow together.

KARLIE.

Rebecca, you've talked about this vision that prophets have and our leaders have for us of what the Church could be if women understood this and lived it. We'd love for you to share an example of a story that you have that kind of illustrates this, the power and the influence that women can have when they understand the authority and the power that they have access to.

REBECCA.

Great question. And I think when we hear the term *priesthood power*, it just seems so huge. It seems so daunting. *Preach My Gospel* and the handbook both have sections where they talk about, What does priesthood power look like? In *Preach My Gospel*, it even says your power "should be evident as you work." Which can also be—"Really? Wow, what does that even look like?" But then it has these bullet points underneath of somewhat unremarkable things that—we may not go, "Wow, that's priesthood power," but it's things like expressing love or feeling the Spirit as you teach and feeling the Spirit confirm what you're teaching, being led to do the right thing or to say the right— So, these are things that we really are familiar with already, and *Preach My Gospel* talks about those as being evidence of priesthood power. I was at one point ministering with a stake Relief Society president prior to a stake conference, and the visiting area authority had pulled us into a room prior to these ministering visits and asked us, "As you go minister, I would like you to remember that you're ministering in the name of Jesus Christ. As you do that, I'd like you to discern, What does this person need? Invite her or him to do something that will bring them closer to Christ. Promise them blessings and testify." That's actually also straight out of *Preach My Gospel*.



KARLIE.

Our young missionary work. Yup.

REBECCA.

Sounds just like— So, our young 18-year-old and 19-year-old sons and daughters are doing this. They're inviting others to come unto Christ. They're promising blessings and testifying. So, as I got in the car with this Relief Society president, she confided in me. She's goes, "OK, I'm a little terrified. I don't know how to do this, and we're going to see someone I don't know, which also adds to it." We got out of the car at this home that looked just picture perfect. It was just—everything in place. You walk inside; there's the family pictures. It almost seemed like there was a chocolate chip cookie wafting in the air. And The Tabernacle Choir— For all intents and purposes, everything looked perfect. And the two of us are sitting on this couch going, "What in the world can we ask this perfect woman to do that she's not already doing, hasn't already written in her journal?"

KARLIE.

Or discern problems.

REBECCA.

Discern problems.

KARLIE.

Because it doesn't appear that anything's wrong.

REBECCA.

Exactly. And so we just got acquainted for a while, and then after a while I watched this stake Relief Society president turn to her and said—and she asked, "What blessing do you feel you need from the Lord?" And in that moment, she began to weep and said, "Two weeks ago, my mom passed away. I knew that would be hard, but what I was not prepared for was the crisis of faith that I'm now facing." And then I watched the stake Relief Society president ask her, "Have you taken this to the Lord? Have you asked Him specifically to help you?" And she said, "Well, He knows what I need; I shouldn't have to ask." And then I continued to watch in awe as this stake Relief Society president



promised her, “I know that if you ask specifically what you need, He will respond, and I can testify to you that I have done that.” And then in true missionary form as we left, she turned back and she goes, “And I’m going to follow up.” I love this example, because it’s quite simple. We can all do that. We don’t have to be a stake Relief Society president. We can just be a ministering sister or a mom.

KARLIE.

Just in our sphere of discernment.

REBECCA.

Just in our own sphere. And we can ask the Lord to help us discern. And she didn’t have an angel say, “Look, her mom just died,” but it was just this prompting: “Ask this question.”

And then she was able to—with power—to testify, to invite her to do something and promise blessings. I think if—ministering could change overnight if we could find ways to do that, to help lift and bless.

SHALYN.

And I think in so many ways people are already doing that in their callings, and they just think they know that they’re being led by the Spirit, but I don’t think we are labeling it correctly. Like, I don’t think they are associating that this is a result of the priesthood power that they have. So I just think that’s important too, to make sure we’re talking about it in the correct ways and making that kind of a normal part of our service and realizing that this priesthood power that we have access to is being manifest in so many ways that we just may not even be identifying.

REBECCA.

That’s a really good point. We have—especially our faithful women who do this all the time. Our mothers, who do this in the homes, and ministering sisters, we’re doing it all the time. But we have not necessarily connected with it as priesthood power.

SHALYN.

Yeah, it is an important connection. Thank you.



KARLIE.

Well, and the description that you gave, that what it is, is it just looks like how the Savior ministers—like you said, it doesn't necessarily appear miraculous; there's not an angel that's going to come to you or a voice from heaven, but it's manifest in Christlike love and service. And it's this extra divine help that comes, and we're going to talk about that a little bit more moving forward. But thank you so much for teaching us, Rebecca, and teaching our listeners.

REBECCA.

A great subject.

KARLIE.

So, we want to kind of continue this idea of divine help in our lives, this help that comes kind of outside our own strength or abilities. And as we've talked, covenant-keeping women, both those who are given authority in their callings but also those who have access through their covenants to this power, can receive this divine help. And you described to us that for you this has looked like the gift of guidance and blessings and fortification at difficult times in your life, including through the pain of divorce. And we know divorce is the experience of some women in the Church, despite their best efforts to preserve their marriages. Would you feel comfortable, Rebecca, sharing some of your experience and how priesthood power and your faith in Jesus Christ and the Atonement brought you peace through this challenging time?

REBECCA.

I appreciate the way you phrased that question, first of all: Would you feel comfortable? Let's talk there for just a second. As I was grappling with— This is 20 years ago, so just to put that in context, but when I was grappling with that extremely difficult decision, I longed for the example of a righteous woman. I wanted to talk to someone who wanted to keep her covenants. What does that look like? And doubtless, there were examples out there, but I couldn't find them. I didn't know where to go. I remember a woman in Tabernacle Choir who had experienced divorce, and she had this sheaf of papers that she clung to. And they were all of the things that she could collect over the years. There just wasn't much out there that I knew of, and I think there are many reasons it's hard to talk about. One, the obvious one: it just feels like such a colossal failure. We don't want to talk about it; it's such a vulnerable position and that other people are involved. You've got a



spouse or even children, and we want to respect their privacy, and then all of this process is very personal, and the decisions and the revelation doesn't apply across the board.

KARLIE.

Sure.

REBECCA.

It's very specific. It's not universal. So when you say comfortable— Well, willing. We'll say willing.

KARLIE.

Thank you.

REBECCA.

And I think willing, because my heart goes out to sisters that are in this position.

SHALYN.

Who are definitely not alone.

REBECCA.

Absolutely not. So we all kind of need to step out of our comfort zones and help each other. Some months after my marriage ended, I got a phone call from my bishop, and he said, "Would you be willing to speak in ward conference?" Sure, absolutely. What's the topic? And he said, "Well, I'd like you to speak about a change that happened in the last year of your life."

SHALYN.

Oh, no. You're not like, "Seriously?"

KARLIE.

Mmmmm, what could you be talking about here?



REBECCA.

I started to grasp, OK, really? And I grasped first at, well, of course, we know what that's going to be. But I had also changed from the high tech Industry to going to work for the Church, so I'm justifying in my mind, "Maybe I can just talk about that."

KARLIE.

It's a career change.

REBECCA.

And the whole ward would know I was totally sand bagging, so I really grappled with this. And I actually prepared two talks. I'm sitting on the stand with two talks, wondering, "What am I going to talk about?" As I walked to the pulpit, I knew I must give the first. And I am so grateful to this bishop for asking me to talk about what I learned in that change, and I went back and found that talk. I talked about four things that I learned through this process. The first one was that I learned I had to dismantle my pride for growth to happen. I had been desperately clinging to this appearance and this facade. But when we give up the facade, we choose to grow. And, frankly, it's a relief. To keep up that appearance is such hard work, and so just letting it go and saying, "OK, my life is a little bit of a train wreck right now." And the women that I confided in were angels on earth for me, and they are dear friends to this day. So I am grateful to learn that succumbing to growth can be extremely painful but absolutely necessary and such a blessing. The second thing for me was it was truly an advanced course in listening to the Spirit. I didn't have a close relationship with anybody who had ever been divorced. I didn't know— And *divorce* was not a word we even spoke about. How could I sever that? And so any thoughts or impressions to dissolve a sealing in the temple, I had to dismiss it. That could not be inspired. And I began to think, "Maybe I'm not listening right. Maybe I'm not hearing the Spirit. Do I need to learn a different way to hear the Spirit?"

KARLIE.

Kind of questioning, right?

REBECCA.

Am I really understanding? I read books. I pored through the scriptures. I went to the temple, counseling, professional help—years. I remember actually going home during this process at some point to Maryland. My father was a sealer in the temple. He'd always just been so good to



counsel with me. And I'm sitting in the living room and saying, "OK, I have two alternatives. Neither one is attractive. What do I do? I don't know what to do." And I remember, in the sanctity of that living room where I grew up, from across the room, my father just listened and then at one point said, "Rebecca, you do know." And that was one of those soul-piercing moments when the Spirit spoke to me. I do? You mean this little inkling of a desire, that's me feeling the Spirit? And when I finally acted on the impressions I was receiving, it seemed like a reunion with the Spirit; it had always been speaking to me the same way. The third thing I talked about was I learned from personal experience why we use the term *exercise* to talk about agency. When we're faced with those choices, especially when the stakes are high, it's strenuous. It's a strenuous exercise. And I really just wanted it to go away. I didn't want to make the decision. I didn't want to be responsible for it. And I found myself wanting to find a priesthood holder, a priesthood leader who would make the decision for me.

KARLIE.

Yes.

REBECCA.

I actively sought earthly permission to execute the decision that had already been directly confirmed by my Heavenly Father. So I learned that God in His infinite wisdom did not let me just escape; He required me to go through the process, and I had to be an agent to myself, which turned out to be a great blessing. And then, number four, the fruit of that strenuous exercise. I can still remember standing at that pulpit, and I can say so today that the seeking, the pleading for, and receiving revelation and mustering the courage to act on it ended in the gift of a firsthand intimate relationship with the Savior. I learned for myself, by experience, that the heavens are open and that divine help is available to us, that He was there. And I said, "I could stand here in front of you completely inconsolable as a single woman, childless, and now not just single but divorced, but I am not inconsolable, and in fact I feel such a great joy and calm and peace. And that can happen no other way than through the Atonement of Christ." So I think my understanding of priesthood power—I couldn't have put it in those words at that time; that came later. All I knew was that I wanted to be obedient. I was confident that I'd be blessed as I honored my covenants. And in retrospect I think all those learnings—that if I would humble myself, the Spirit could teach me when I sought revelation, the Lord would speak to me, and when I acted on it, the Lord would be with me. And now President Nelson summarized those learnings for me in so many beautiful quotes. One of



them: every woman and every man who makes covenants with God and keeps those covenants and who participates worthily in priesthood ordinances has direct access to the power of God.

KARLIE.

Rebecca, that's amazing. Thank you so much for sharing these hard-learned lessons. I'm so strengthened by your really—encouragement to women that empowers them, that they can receive guidance for themselves unique to their situations that is not going to look like their friend or their neighbor or their mom or sister and that they can act for themselves and then that the promise is that God will help. He will be there. You won't be alone. I just am so grateful. And I've learned so much from your experience.

SHALYN.

I actually just had lunch yesterday with one of my previous Young Women leaders, who's been a great friend to me through my adult life, and she's been divorced. And she had shared with me previously some insights into her experience, and it's helped me in my marriage. And I haven't been divorced, but just her being willing to kind of share these lessons that she's learned and her perspective have strengthened—I don't know, they've strengthen my marriage. And it's just amazing. She even said yesterday, she's like—it's not easy to share these very difficult, very personal, and very individualized experiences, but it really does strengthen so many people in so many ways. I can just think of lots of listeners who are going to feel validated in your sharing. They might feel that hope, and they might be encouraged to share their experience too, and it's just kind of this ripple effect that we can all kind of strengthen each other through our very difficult experiences and—anyway, we just really appreciate you being so willing, like you said, to share and open up.

REBECCA.

I hope so. And I can actually say in all honesty and frankness that today I'm grateful. I'm grateful for that experience. And I learned. We've heard the scripture, "All these things still give thee experience, and shall be for thy good." And that is absolutely true. Experience is what you get when you don't get what you want. There's some of that sense in that, but it was definitely for my good. But even more, I've loved the scripture in Nephi that He consecrates our afflictions for our gain. And I think the lessons that I learned have been that solid foundation that continues to bless me throughout my life. The divine



response wasn't, "Hey, let's clean up this mess and we'll just get you back on your way." Instead it was, "Let's take this gut-wrenching experience and make it into a conversion process that will bless your entire life."

SHALYN.

Well, there's probably another difficult element of your experience that the Church teaches: ideals. The ideal marriage and family, for example, the ideal path of obedience, the ideal way the Church units should be organized and function to support a covenant-living life. But you mentioned messiness and, you know, life in our marriages, families, wards—they just sometimes are "messy," to use your words, and often don't go as planned or hoped, despite our best efforts. We would just love to know, How have you coped with continuing to strive for the ideal and believing in it while accepting this messiness of life?

REBECCA.

That's a great question. I think we have to just accept, like you said, life is messy; we're in a mortal sphere; we're in a learning laboratory. I've always loved Bruce Hafen's quote that "because of the Atonement, we can learn from our experience without being condemned by [it]." That gives me so much hope.

SHALYN.

That's powerful, yeah.

REBECCA.

Peter, the Apostle Peter, 1 Peter 4:12—I've always loved this scripture: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened [to] you." I think we do that. Like, "What in the world is happening to me? This was not in my plan." None of what I just talked about was anything that I wrote down in Young Women when we're talking about—

KARLIE.

Ten years from now, 20 years from now. Yes.

REBECCA.



What I was experiencing; that was not there. But those experiences that drive us to our knees are sacred holy temples for us, and that's when we have those very personal, undeniable experiences with God that carry us through. So I just think if we can help our sisters understand that His consecrating influence helps us know Him personally—essentially they're blessings. I remember being in Guyana and hearing a new convert say a prayer in a district conference, and she got—in her prayer she said, “We thank thee, God, for all of the blessings thou seest fit to inflict upon us.” And I thought, “It's probably not exactly what she meant,” but the more I think about it—

SHALYN.

That's life.

REBECCA.

That is life, and some of the greatest blessings come from blessings that seem to have been inflicted upon us.

SHALYN.

Well, and I was just thinking kind of the more children that we have, the more opportunity there are for trials.

REBECCA.

That's right.

SHALYN.

And difficulties, so I love that wording, that—

KARLIE.

Well, and I think, too, the way you framed it as this divine help is not just to tidy up the mess of our lives but to actually help us grow and become—I think that is a mindset, too, that we can have when we face difficulties and challenges, that it's like this isn't really a deviation from the path that is supposed to be happening; this is the path to help me become. If we invoke God's help and rely on Him, He can make it into something that will help us grow.



REBECCA.

Yeah.

SHALYN.

Which no one likes.

KARLIE.

No one likes to hear that, and we can't tell people that, like, "oh, this is just here for your growth," or, "this is going to help you become." But I think that when we, like you said, humble ourselves, that that can be the result.

REBECCA.

Absolutely.

KARLIE.

Easy to say decades later, right?

SHALYN.

Easy to say.

REBECCA.

It is. In fact, there is a great scripture in 1 Nephi 17 that talks about—when you reach the promised land, you will look back and see that God led you there—whatever our promised land is—and then we'll see His hand in our lives through those storms, through the waves, whatever it was, but we will appreciate the journey. Yeah.

KARLIE.

And that's why it's so wonderful to have you here, to be able to share from the vantage point that you're at now, looking back, that can be so encouraging to others. And that's where we want to move with our next question. What would you say to someone who is in the thick of the messiness and just feels like, "I cannot do this; my life will never match the ideal that is



taught, and I just want to give up and step away.” How do they find belonging? How do they find a path forward?

REBECCA.

Great question. And I think we all have that question at some point in our lives, maybe often. The word *ideal*, that’s a tough one for me, and I think we need to make sure we’re differentiating between doctrine and culture. And there’s so much in the culture that says, “This is the ideal,” and those are usually externally imposed. It’s some kind of a nostalgic Norman Rockwell scene. And I think when we look at that, what are we talking about, the ideals. Is it will you marry? How many children? What the shape or structure of your family is? Are you a stay-at-home mom or are you a working mom? It can get so confusing. What is ideal? Can we simplify and just say, “According to the doctrine of the Church, ideal would be to come to know the Savior by making and keeping covenants with Him”? All covenants that are available. If that is, then we can all be on the covenant path, and we can all be living an ideal life, and we can just help each other. Our journeys are going to look different—the covenant path will be the same, but our faith journeys might be very different. I think the second thing would be, is that divorce is something I experienced, but it’s not who I am. I don’t categorize myself—or if I did, I could say I’m a divorcee; I’m childless, having never given birth. I’m a stepmom. I’m a second—I could get really depressed. All of those things are true, but I don’t categorize myself that way. I think we need to go back and think about, “Who am I? I’m on the covenant path. I want to keep and make covenants with my Savior and have a relationship with Him.”

KARLIE.

That’s a really good distinction, I think. I like how you said simplify, right? Let’s simplify. What actually are we being asked to do, or what is the hope and expectation, and it is that. And that could be achieved regardless of situation or where you live, how you live. That’s available.

SHALYN.

Rebecca, you married your husband Dan in 2007 after the death of his first wife, Debra, and this is such a beautiful story. As we shared in the introduction with this marriage, you became an instant mom and grandma, and you and Dan have served several missions together. Will you tell us about the



miracles that brought you and Dan together and then how you've seen the hand of the Lord in your marriage?

REBECCA.

Well, I love this story, actually. So, Dan lost his wife Debra after a two-and-a-half-year battle with leukemia.

SHALYN.

Wow.

REBECCA.

They were married for 31 years, and they had six children together. He was the bishop of his ward when she passed away. One of his counselors had been an associate director of The Tabernacle Choir. And this counselor's daughter Shannon sang in the Choir. She was soprano number 42; I was soprano number 43. So we dressed by each other; we had our library by each other. So we knew each other very well. And early one morning before getting ready for the broadcast, she came to me and she just said, "You know, I do know the perfect man for you. He's just not ready yet." And when she began to describe him and his family, it was one of those experiences when the Spirit speaks to you—it's just everything just stops for a minute. And I can still remember the moment, and I just had this distinct impression: "Rebecca, you pay attention." I thought, "Great. I am done dating. I will just wait until this man, whoever he is, is ready." And it was some time later, he called and we arranged to meet. He was actually still the bishop, still an exceptional situation, still serving as a bishop, and I was heading from Salt Lake, where I lived, past Highland, where he lived, to see my sister in Salem. I said, "Well, we'll just stop by and we'll meet you then." So, my first sight of him, he was kind of reeling me in as I got a little lost with directions. So, he's standing in the doorway of the church in his suit with his cell phone to his head. And my heart did a little leap. I thought, "Oh, Shannon didn't mention how handsome he is." And learning the story later—so, he was still in the middle of meet—they had finished all of their block meetings, but he had a few meetings, and so we hadn't communicated very well on the phone. So his counselors were covering for him and peering out the windows with their wives. The bishop was going on a date. We often call it our first interview, because he was more attuned to interviewing than dating after being married for 31 years, so—



SHALYN.

And that was his mode.

REBECCA.

That was his mode. I really felt like I was being interviewed by a bishop. So he grilled me. I grilled him back. I think I wept through a lot of it, because part of my feeling was, “I do not want you to think of me as a divorcee; I am a covenant-keeping woman.” But we both shared our priorities. I still wanted to hopefully have a child. He had six; was he open to having more? And he wanted to be a missionary, which was music to my ears, because since my young mission I could think of nothing more I wanted to do with my husband than to serve a mission. So we both put it on the table, and that’s how it started. There were so many very personal whisperings and evidences and confirmations that were very evident, and as we’ve talked about before, when they’re personal, they don’t make a whole lot of sense to anybody else, but they’re so meaningful. I do—one experience I had shortly after we were married: I was still working for the Church, and I was finishing up a proposal that needed confirmation at that point from Elder Oaks and Elder Nelson. And I knew from experience that they would be at least a half an hour early, so I went over 45 minutes early to get set up and make sure the PowerPoint was running, and I knew there would be quite a few people from my department there. And when I got all set up, I’m still alone in the room, and ,very unusual, no one from my department appeared, and then in came Elder Oaks and Elder Nelson. So I’m in this room alone with Elder Oaks and Elder Nelson, and it occurs to me: I am sitting with two Apostles who have the same experience in marriage that my husband and I are having.

SHALYN.

How interesting.

REBECCA.

So I took advantage of it and I just said— Elder Nelson had actually been in my ward, so he knew me, and he said, “How are you doing?” And so I was able to say, “I’ve just gotten married.” And then I said, “How would you advise me?” So I had a good 10 minutes of personal instruction from both of these men, and I have to say it wasn’t anything that you would go, “Oh, I never would have thought of that.” But it was so tender and so focused on love, and they both talked about their new wives as being very supportive of the family,



very involved with their children, and very loving toward the deceased spouse. In our home in Highland, we have on the main floor Dan's wedding picture with Debbie from 1976 on the west side and Dan's wedding picture with me on the east side. And we have the last family picture with Debbie in the family room and the current family picture with me in the dining room. So we just—in our home, we celebrate Debbie. She's a part of our lives. I was just so grateful for these little tender mercies that just said, "You're in the right place."

KARLIE.

That's beautiful.

SHALYN.

That's incredible.

KARLIE.

So, we're excited to have the chance to talk with you about your experience because while miraculous and beautiful as your experience has been, second marriages and stepparenting can also be very complicated. And, as you've shared before, with the experience of your divorce, no two situations of second marriages and stepparenting are exactly alike. So we'd love for you to share with us how you have navigated some of these challenges in your own marriage and family.

REBECCA.

That's a great question. We were just talking about confirmations. I feel that when there's a confirmation, even the difficult things are still navigable. When I haven't had that foundation or that confirmation, it's easy to say, "Am I really in the right place?"

KARLIE.

Kind of question.

REBECCA.

Kind of questioning it. But when you've got that foundation, you can just work out the small things and the big things. You know, candidly speaking, as I was falling in love, there were times when I thought,



“How come I couldn’t have been the first?” “How come I couldn’t be the only?” But I have to say, as soon as I had that thought, I was strictly reprimanded by the Spirit, saying, “Don’t go there.” And it was very clear, and that was strength beyond my own. I also remember a conversation with one of my friends from college who, after we married, she just point-blank put it in front of me: “How do you feel being married to a man who was in love with another woman?” And I thought, “Wow, I never thought of it that way.”

KARLIE.

Exactly like that.

REBECCA.

I never thought of it that way, but I guess from the outside looking in, that’s how it could look. But having had my experience of all of these confirmations, I knew I was exactly where I was supposed to be, and that allowed me to look at it through my own lenses, that this is where I am to be, and this is exactly where the Lord wants me. Nothing’s fatal; it all works out when you’ve got that foundation. I know that my situation is different than many second marriages because I had no biological children, so we’re not blending families. So in that sense, it’s much easier, I’m sure. And also because, for me, this is an answer to prayer. I never got to be a mom, and now I get to be a mom. The kids were mostly grown by the time I married into the family, and there were five grandchildren, but I can embrace them as my own and look at that as an answer to prayer and a great tender mercy.

There are lots of questions. It’s fun to watch little grandkids try to figure it out. I remember Hallie, when she was six. She crawled into bed with grandma; she looked at me and she goes, “Grandma, do you miss Grandma Debbie?” That one kind of stumped me for a minute. I don’t know quite how to respond to that. And little Kate just recently, she was six, and she’s doing the math. “OK, I have three grandmas, right? Are you my stepgrandma? No, we don’t use that word, right? Because you’re not mean.” All of these cute little things.

KARLIE.

It’s at age six, apparently, when these questions start coming out.



REBECCA.

That's right. Both at the same time. And as I've been trying to figure out—because I don't know what the sealing looks like, but I can say it doesn't cause me angst, and that is a blessing from the Spirit. When we were serving a public affairs mission in the Dominican Republic, one of the Twelve came down to visit with us and gathered all of the senior missionaries together for a family home evening and just let us ask questions. So I mustered my courage and said, "Look, I've just been married. I have these wonderful children for the first time in my life. I'd like to consider them mine. How does the sealing work?" And he gave a beautiful answer that really focused on the sealing between man and woman, and I appreciated that explanation. We left; we went home to our apartment there in Santa Domingo, and I pulled up my email just to make sure I was on top of everything, and there was an email from my oldest grandchild, Todd, who at the time would have been about eight. I'd never received an email from him before. The email read, "Hi, Grandma, I love you. Todd." There's my answer directly from heaven. These are yours. You can love them. And I am so grateful for the Spirit that communicates. We don't know all the specifics, and we don't need to know. And I can navigate that because I know that the Lord has a plan.

SHALYN.

I just know that that is going to be really meaningful to a lot of people that have the exact same question.

KARLIE.

And thank you for acknowledging, again, this concern that many women have who are faithful and rely on those covenants. How does this look? You know, how does this look between sealings and husbands and wives and children? And to acknowledge your questions about that and how you've received comfort and peace despite there being unknowns is really wonderful. Thank you for sharing. As we wrap up, we want to ask if there is anything more that you would like to share with the women of the Church or those listening to the podcast.

REBECCA.

You know, I think as we navigate life, messy life, if it is messy right now, I'd love to be in person with you and just put my arms around you. It won't be messy forever. It does get better. It really does. And not only does it just get better; it creates this foundation for your life that you can



pull on forever. As I was thinking about this, I remember a conversation with my father. I depended on him and my mom so much through this process. They lived on the East Coast, I was in Utah at the time, and I would often wake up at 3:00 a.m. not being able to sleep. I knew my dad would be up, because he always gone up at five, so—poor guy—he got all of these phone calls. And when things kind of settled down and I had met Dan and we were preparing to marry, I had a really sweet discussion with my dad, and he just said, “You know, I’m so happy. I’m so happy for where you are. I just see so many blessings in your life. It’s just the only thing that makes me sad is I will miss our close conversations.” And I imagine Heavenly Father to have those same feelings. He just wants to be a part of our lives. He is our Father. He’s a tender Father who loves to talk to us. So I would just encourage anyone who’s in whatever kind of mess it is, and if we’re not in one now, we will be in one at some point.

KARLIE.

We’ll find a mess, yup.

REBECCA.

We’ll find a mess. I can just testify that the Lord is in the details of our lives and loves us more than we ever can imagine, and He knows how to give good gifts. As we draw near unto Him, He will draw near unto us. I’m so grateful for a Father in Heaven who is so personal.

SHALYN.

Well, Rebecca, thank you so much. You’ve had so many difficult experiences in your life and so many beautiful experiences in your life, and I’m so grateful for your willingness to just open up and share both and how they’ve made you who you are, and I just think that you’ve provided so much hope for so many people. Thank you so much for coming.

REBECCA.

You’re welcome. Thanks for having me.

KARLIE.

We’ve loved having you here. And to our listeners, thank you so much for tuning in to this episode of the *Latter-day Saint Women* podcast. As a reminder, we have new episodes released every week, and we hope



you'll continue to tune in and share these episodes with such remarkable women's stories of remarkable women and with your friends and family members. We love hearing from listeners via email and on Apple Podcasts reviews. So if you have not shared your thoughts there, we encourage you to do so; we love hearing from you. You can also contact us at podcast@ChurchofJesusChrist.org with any suggestions for topics or guests.

SHALYN.

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KARLIE.

And I'm Karlie Guymon. Thanks for listening.

