

THE SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE OF

"We call upon the women of the Church to stand together for righteousness. . . . I see this as the one bright shining hope in [the] world."
—President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008)



WOMEN



Do we know the power of our spiritual strength?

By Starla Averkamp Butler

Many wonderful, humble women in the Church provide dedicated service without realizing the far-reaching impact their lives have—as examples of temporal service, but also as legacies of spiritual strength. One such woman is my grandmother, Cherie Petersen. She has served faithfully in quiet callings all her life. If you asked her, she would claim that she doesn't have many talents to offer the world. However, as I have started to learn about her life, I've realized just how much her spiritual strength has affected my life.

Cherie's parents stopped attending church and divorced when she was still very young, so she grew up with a mother, Florence, who was always working. Florence had been neglected as a child, as she was raised in a boarding school while her mother, Georgia, lived a worldly life. In spite of the challenges in her upbringing, Cherie remained active in the gospel, faithfully attending church with her great-grandmother Elizabeth's family or with friends. She saw in their families what she wanted for her own. She didn't know exactly what a family should be like, but she knew what it shouldn't be, and she was determined to have her future family be different.

Cherie's husband—my grandpa Dell—once told me, “To have a testimony, you have to want it. Cherie always wanted a testimony.” Though their early years of marriage were filled with struggles, they were determined to remain strong as a family. They were less active during the first year of their marriage because of Dell's work schedule, but a call to serve in the Primary prompted Cherie to begin attending, and Dell soon joined her at church as a deacons quorum adviser. They've both been active and strong in the Church ever since. Cherie's

DAUGHTERS OF DEITY, BY KATHLEEN PETERSON, MAY NOT BE COPIED

willingness to serve and determination to raise a strong family helped my mother become the strong woman she is, and my mother's example has helped define my life, especially as I now start my own family.

As women we can have a profound spiritual influence on the lives of those around us. Indeed, Joseph Smith taught that our role is “not only to relieve the poor, but to save souls.”¹ Jesus Christ has called the women of His Church to be His disciples and to be strong spiritually. Our spiritual strength and influence are vital in the progression of the work of salvation, and we need to seek opportunities to spiritually strengthen those around us. As we do, the influence of our faith and righteousness will last far beyond what we can see.

Called to Be Disciples

Elder James E. Talmage (1862–1933) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles wrote, “The world’s greatest champion of woman and womanhood is Jesus the Christ.”² Think, for example, of what He taught two of His female disciples in the New Testament, sisters Mary and Martha. The book *Daughters in My Kingdom* explains: “Luke 10 contains an account of Martha opening her home to Jesus. She served the Lord by taking care of His temporal needs, and Mary sat at the Master’s feet and absorbed His teachings.

“In an age when women were generally expected to provide only temporal service, the Savior taught Martha and Mary that women could also participate spiritually in His work. He invited them to become His disciples and partake of salvation, ‘that good part’ that would never be taken from them.”³

Like Martha, sometimes we make the mistake of thinking that the primary role of women is to offer temporal



Four generations: Elizabeth (left), holding her granddaughter Florence. Annie (center) came to Utah with her parents and is Elizabeth’s mother. Georgia (right) is Elizabeth’s daughter, but Georgia and her daughter Florence left the Church. It was faithful Elizabeth who helped her great-granddaughter Cherie and Cherie’s posterity return to the gospel.

service, such as providing meals, sewing, and cleaning for others. This service is a valuable and cherished sacrifice; however, even more than He needs sisters who can sew and cook, the Lord needs women of spiritual power whose faith, righteousness, and charity shine through in their lives. He knows that we each have so much to offer. Jesus Christ calls *all* of us to develop our spiritual strength and ability to receive and act on revelation to help move His work forward. Linda K. Burton, Relief Society general president, said to the sisters, “You have been sent to earth in this dispensation of time because of who you are and what

you have been prepared to do! Regardless of what Satan would try to persuade us to think about who we are, our true identity is that of a disciple of Jesus Christ!”⁴

The Lord knows us and our situations, and He has a work for each of us to do on this earth. No sister knows too little or has too few talents to be a spiritual force for good and bring others to Christ. With this divine potential we have the responsibility to become spiritual leaders in our homes and communities. Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles proclaimed, “Every sister in this Church who has made covenants with the Lord has a divine mandate to help save souls, to lead the women of the world, to strengthen the homes of Zion, and to build the kingdom of God.”⁵

We do not have to be in high positions or do unusual things to help those around us make choices that will lead them closer to Jesus Christ—our most important duty. Both the largest and the smallest things we do in the lives of one or two people, even just within our own family, can have a profound impact.



Women in the Work of Salvation

A beloved hymn states, “The errand of angels is given to women; and this is a gift that, as sisters, we claim.”⁶ We have much to offer in lives of those we love. Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has shared stories of how the spiritual strength of two women affected his life:

“When I was a young child, my father was not a member of the Church and my mother had become less active. . . . Some months after my eighth birthday, Grandmother Whittle came across the country to visit us. Grandmother was concerned that neither I nor my older brother had been baptized. I don’t know what she said to my parents about this, but I do know that one morning she

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took my brother and me to the park and shared with us her feelings about the importance of being baptized and attending Church meetings regularly. I don’t remember the specifics of what she said, but her words stirred something in my heart, and soon my brother and I were baptized. . . .

“Grandmother used just the right amount of courage and respect to help our father recognize the importance of his driving us to the church for our meetings. In every appropriate way, she helped us to feel a need for the gospel in our lives.”⁷

A second source of spiritual strength was Elder Scott’s wife, Jeanene. When they were dating they began to talk about the future. Jeanene, who had grown up



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in a strong missionary home, expressed her desire to marry a returned missionary in the temple. Elder Scott, who hadn't thought much about serving a mission before, was strongly impacted. "I went home, and I could think of nothing else. I was awake all night long. . . . After many prayers I made the decision to meet with my bishop and begin my missionary application."⁸ Although Jeanene gave him the guidance and prompting he needed, Elder Scott said, "Jeanene never asked me to serve a mission *for her*. She loved me enough to share her conviction and then gave me the opportunity to work out the direction of my own life. We both served missions and later were sealed in the temple. Jeanene's courage and commitment to her faith have made all the difference in our lives together. I am certain we would not

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have found the happiness we enjoy without her strong faith in the principle of serving the Lord first. She is a wonderful, righteous example!"⁹

It was the spiritual influence of these women in his life that helped just one young man—Elder Scott—make some of the most important decisions in his life: to be baptized, to serve a mission, and to marry in the temple.

We can help others want to make good choices by our example, actions, words, and personal righteousness. Carole M. Stephens, first counselor in the Relief Society general presidency, proclaims, "We are covenant daughters in the Lord's kingdom, and we have the opportunity to be instruments in His hands. . . . We participate in the work of salvation each day in small and simple ways—watching over, strengthening, and

teaching one another.”¹⁰ As we rely on the Spirit and press forward in sincere and humble efforts to help those around us come closer to Christ, we will be guided in what we can do and given the strength to do it, and we will feel the joy of bringing the Lord’s children unto Him.

Becoming a Spiritual Influence

Knowing our responsibility, we might ask as disciples of old, “What shall we do” (Acts 2:37) to be a spiritual influence? In a recent general conference, Sister Burton invited the sisters to imagine “some of the possible spiritual ‘help wanted’ signs related to the work of salvation:

- Help wanted: parents to bring up their children in light and truth
- Help wanted: daughters . . . , sisters . . . , aunts . . . , cousins, grandparents, and true friends to serve as mentors and offer helping hands along the covenant path
- Help wanted: those who listen to the promptings of the Holy Ghost and act on impressions received
- Help wanted: those who live the gospel daily in small and simple ways
- Help wanted: family history and temple workers to link families eternally
- Help wanted: missionaries and members to spread the ‘good news’—the gospel of Jesus Christ
- Help wanted: rescuers to find those who have lost their way
- Help wanted: covenant keepers to stand firm for truth and right
- Help wanted: true disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.”¹¹

These aren’t new things, but when we seek opportunities to participate in the work of salvation, we will improve our ability to help those around us. Elder Ballard said, “There is nothing in this world as personal, as nurturing, or as life changing as the influence of a righteous woman.”¹² As we develop our spiritual power through personal prayer and scripture study, firm obedience, and faithfully keeping our covenants, we will become that influence.

Beyond What We Can See

President Brigham Young (1801–1877) said, “Can you tell the amount of good that the mothers and daughters in Israel are capable of doing? No, it is impossible. And the good they will do will follow them to all eternity.”¹³

My grandmother’s righteous decisions have impacted her family generations past what she could see as a young woman. However, the spiritual influence of the women in my family stretches even farther back. Cherie gained much of her own spiritual strength from observing her great-grandmother (my third great-grandmother) Elizabeth. Elizabeth’s example of faith and testimony reached past two generations of inactivity to help her great-granddaughter Cherie reverse a trend of broken families and return to the Church.

As we become a spiritual strength to those around us, our influence will stretch beyond what we can see. President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) said, “We call upon the women of the Church to stand together for righteousness. They must begin in their own homes. They can teach it in their classes. They can voice it in their communities. . . .

“I see this as the one bright shining hope in a world that is marching toward self-destruction.”¹⁴

As we fulfill this command, the work of the Lord will be urged forward both in the world around us and, most importantly, in our families and the lives of those we love. ■

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NOTES

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 453.
2. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 3rd ed. (1916), 475.
3. *Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society* (2011), 3–4.
4. Linda K. Burton, “Wanted: Hands and Hearts to Hasten the Work,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 122–123.
5. M. Russell Ballard, “Women of Righteousness,” *Ensign*, Apr. 2002, 70.
6. “As Sisters in Zion,” *Hymns*, no. 309.
7. Richard G. Scott, “I Have Given You an Example,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 32.
8. Richard G. Scott, “I Have Given You an Example,” 33.
9. Richard G. Scott, “I Have Given You an Example,” 33.
10. Carole M. Stephens, “We Have Great Reason to Rejoice,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2013, 117.
11. Linda K. Burton, “Wanted: Hands and Hearts to Hasten the Work,” 124.
12. M. Russell Ballard, “Mothers and Daughters,” *Ensign*, May 2010, 18.
13. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe (1954), 216.
14. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Standing Strong and Immovable,” *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, Jan. 10, 2004, 20.