



By Elder  
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## THE ENDURING INFLUENCE OF **Righteous Women**

*I appreciate the example of faithful Latter-day Saints  
who, like Naomi and Ruth of ancient times,  
demonstrate and embody pure religion.*

### **A Widow's Faith**

One of the truly beautiful accounts in the Old Testament is the story of Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi. Consider the remarkable example demonstrated by Ruth and what brethren and sisters alike can learn from her.

Ruth became a widow at a relatively young age. She was a committed convert and made great sacrifices as she left home and relatives for Bethlehem. She famously declared to Naomi, “Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God” (Ruth 1:16). She showed complete loyalty and faithfulness to her widowed mother-in-law as she supported her in many ways, including providing food she gleaned from the fields of Boaz. In other words, despite being a widow herself, Ruth demonstrated pure religion in how she ministered to another widow, Naomi, in her time of affliction.

Ruth was known to all the people of the city as a virtuous woman (see Ruth 3:11.) Other women, seeing how good Ruth was to her mother-in-law and how she loved and cared for her, paid the extraordinary compliment that she was “better to [Naomi] than seven sons” (Ruth 4:15).



In a wonderful tribute to her goodness, Ruth was blessed to have in her lineage both King David and Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Her influence as a righteous woman has continued through the centuries, as millions who read the Old Testament have been uplifted and inspired by the book of Ruth.

### A Mother's Faith

As I marvel at modern-day Naomis and Ruths, I think of my 90-year-old mother living in New Zealand, who has been a widow for 30 years. When I was called to be a General Authority Seventy in 2016, I visited her with the unexpected news of our assignment to Africa. I nervously shared that I did not know when I would be able to see her again.

With tears in her eyes she simply said, "Mark, the Lord needs you more than I do . . . and it would be selfish of me to want it any other way." Such is the faith of a righteous woman who has been a great example all my life.

*"The Lord needs you more than I do," my mother (below) said. "It would be selfish of me to want it any other way."*



In James 1:27 we learn that "pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction." I am profoundly thankful for family members, home teachers, visiting teachers, ward members, and other loving Saints who regularly visit my mother and in so doing demonstrate pure religion.

### Faithful Sisters

Many of our Latter-day Saint sisters exemplify Christlike service and teaching. As I have visited wards and branches in my assignment in Africa during the past two years, I have been especially impressed by the beautiful testimonies of African sisters teaching pure doctrine from well-worn scriptures both at the pulpit and in the classroom.

Sadly, sometimes sisters feel less important or less valued than their brethren. But we simply need to look at the example of the Savior to know that such is not His way. Consider how He loved Mary and Martha and took comfort from His visits with them. And in an act of great symbolic importance, the resurrected Lord appeared first, not to His Apostles, but to Mary Magdalene and also (according to the Gospel of Matthew) to "the other Mary" (see Matthew 28:1, 9). When the resurrected Savior appeared to the Nephites, He invited all—sisters, brothers, and children—to come to Him so He could minister to them one by one (see 3 Nephi 11:14–15).

### A Faithful Pioneer

A year ago my wife and I were blessed to participate in a young single adult devotional in Luanda, Angola. Maer Emanuel Gonçalves de Carvalho, the branch president at the time, conducted the meeting. He is an excellent returned missionary, recently married in the temple. After the devotional, he introduced me to his mother, Paulina Lassaete Gonçalves. Since that time, I have learned more about this fine sister, who is a beloved pioneer of the Church in Angola.

This remarkable single sister raised six children, mostly on her own. Thanks, in part, to her example and gospel-centered teaching in the home, three of them have served

*Sister Paulina Lassaete Gonçalves (below) raised her children mostly on her own but made sure a gospel influence was in the home.*



missions or are now serving, while two more are preparing. Brother Carvalho writes: “My brother and I enjoyed listening to Book of Mormon stories which my mother shared with us when we were little. She used to put Book of Mormon pictures on the walls of our room and we loved them. We had a little box where we saved money for our missions when we grew up. We had family prayers every day, and my mother read the scriptures to us. . . . We prayed, sang, and listened to stories that Mom read to us.”<sup>1</sup> Such is the influence of a righteous and faithful sister in the gospel!

### To Shepherds in Israel

All of us, especially those called as shepherds in Israel, should visit the fatherless and the widows and pay special attention to our single sisters and single mothers so we can involve them, learn from their examples of faith, and seek to ease their individual and unique burdens. You who are called as leaders, listen well to the sisters with whom you serve—and especially those you are called to serve—and heed their inspired counsel.

Honestly and prayerfully consider your own personal actions and ask yourself:

- How can I help change the experiences of women in the Church so they know their participation in ward and stake councils is meaningful and essential

and they feel valued as full and equal participants in every council setting?

- What experiences and opportunities do widows and single members need so that they feel more included in family settings and less isolated or neglected in this family-focused church?
- What can wives and husbands do at home so that one does not dominate and both become contributing and full partners, governing their family together in righteousness?

### Future of the Church

Just as the righteous examples of Ruth and Naomi have inspired generations, so faithful women will have an ever-increasing and prominent impact on the future of the Church. In 1979, President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) prophesied: “Much of the major growth that is coming to the Church in the last days will come because many of the good women of the world . . . will be drawn to the Church in large numbers. This will happen to the degree that the women of the Church reflect righteousness . . . in their lives and to the degree that the women of the Church are seen as distinct and different—in happy ways—from the women of the world.”<sup>2</sup> We are now seeing this prophecy fulfilled in a wonderful way.

### Testimony

The greatly loved Bible account of Ruth and Naomi teaches many lessons, including loyalty, devotion, faithfulness, virtue, and the power of compassion and Christlike service. To any sisters in the Church who may feel neglected or unloved, I testify that Heavenly Father knows and loves you. You are His daughters. Our sincere prayer is that throughout the Church, programs will never replace pure religion and that every member, no matter their circumstances, will feel valued and loved. ■

#### NOTES

1. Maer Emanuel Gonçalves de Carvalho, “I Chose to Serve,” [africase.lds.org/i-chose-to-serve](http://africase.lds.org/i-chose-to-serve).
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* (2006), 222–23.