





Women's Power to Serve

*The phrase “help meet” in the scriptures used to bother me.
Now it empowers me.*

By Angela Ashurst-McGee

As a Sunbeam in Primary, I learned the truth that I am a child of God. Since then, some of my most cherished experiences have been when the Spirit has testified to me of God's love for each of His children. On many occasions—in the temple, in my private prayers, as I bear testimony—I have felt that God knows, values, and loves each of us individually.

This knowledge is especially dear to me as a woman. The world often demeans and misunderstands women by sexualizing them, devaluing their voices and contributions, and making them the objects of violence and oppression. In contrast, the gospel of Jesus Christ empowers women by teaching of our divine nature. I am a daughter of heavenly parents, tasked with becoming like them.

Help Meet

Because the gospel has been a source of power and encouragement in my life as a woman, I have been confused by this scripture verse: “And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him” (Genesis 2:18).

To me, a “help meet” sounded like a sidekick, like someone filling a lower, supporting role. In fact, throughout history this phrase has often been used to justify the claim that women were created to serve in a subservient position. For example, one of the interpretations for “help meet” proposed by 18-century biblical scholar John Gill was that a woman's purpose as a “help meet” was to make man “comfortable

... to dress his food ... be pleasing to his sight, and ... be in all respects ... entirely answerable to his ... wants and wishes.”¹

This interpretation did not match my knowledge of God’s views of women! I knew that God doesn’t see me as an assistant or sidekick with a role to merely please others and fill their wishes. But even though I knew this in my heart, seeing that verse in my scriptures felt uncomfortable.

Ezer Kenegdo

Things changed one day when I learned more about the Hebrew words translated as “help meet” in the King James Version of the Bible. This knowledge gave me a whole new perspective and greater understanding of my divine work as a woman.

The phrase translated as “help meet” comes from two Hebrew words, *ezer* and *kenegdo*.

Ezer means “help,” but in a distinct way. In English, a “helper” is sometimes thought of as someone in a low position, but *ezer* describes strength. It suggests that the individual has power to rescue others. *Ezer* is used 21 times in the Old Testament, always describing a person with the capacity allowing one to help, protect, or aid.² In most of these cases, *ezer* describes the way God offers help to rescue humankind. For example:

- “For the God of my father, said he, was mine help [ezer], and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh” (Exodus 18:4).
- “Happy art thou, O Israel ... saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help [ezer]” (Deuteronomy 33:29).
- “But I am poor and needy: make haste unto me, O God: thou art my help [ezer] and my deliverer” (Psalm 70:5).
- “O Israel, trust thou in the Lord: he is their help [ezer] and their shield” (Psalm 115:9).
- “My help [ezer] cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth” (Psalm 121:2).
- “In me [the Lord] is thine help [ezer]” (Hosea 13:9).

Though its meaning is less definitive, scholars agree that *kenegdo* means “corresponding to” and “opposite to.” It describes two things that are next to each other and complementary to each other, but different from each other—like facing opposites.

Putting these two terms together, we see that *ezer kenegdo* suggests that God created Eve in counterpart to Adam, with the power to rescue and serve. “Help meet” is not a label of inferiority but an acknowledgment of strength!

Using Our Power to Serve

While the calling to serve and nurture has often been portrayed by society as weak or inferior, *ezer kenegdo* teaches us that part of our God-given nature as women includes a strength to serve. I help others not because I am a lowly servant but because I possess the power to rescue and aid.

Many of the sweetest experiences of my life have come through service. When I lead my children, I fulfill my role as *ezer kenegdo* by protecting and nurturing them. When I teach the gospel, serve in my community, lift up the weak, or stand for righteousness, I exercise my *ezer kenegdo*. When I further



DISTINCTIVE CAPABILITIES

“My dear sisters, whatever your calling, whatever your circumstances, we need your impressions, your insights,

and your inspiration. We need you to speak up and speak out in ward and stake councils. ... Married or single, you sisters possess distinctive capabilities and special intuition you have received as gifts from God.”

President Russell M. Nelson, “A Plea to My Sisters,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2015, 97.



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my education, experience, skills, and talents, I expand the scope of my *ezer*.

I know many women whose abilities, education, and strength of character enable them to provide needed service. They draw on their unique insights and talents to serve in ways others wouldn't have thought of or may not have been capable of. Here are just a few examples from women I know.

- A sister felt guilty about her poor scripture-reading habits but didn't feel confident enough to study on her own. Her ministering sister Anita had strength as a student of the scriptures, so Anita became her "scripture coach." Anita sent a text message to her friend each day with a reading assignment. The sister texted back when she had finished reading, and they shared questions or thoughts with each other. They were both lifted by their study.
- One morning Shannon got a phone call from a friend in crisis. Because Shannon had experienced similar circumstances, she was able to offer honest understanding. After listening to her friend, she felt prompted to say, "As women of God, we are promised blessings of comfort and strength. Let's pray together over the phone, and I have faith God will hear our prayers. We can ask Him together for comfort." Shannon's prayer brought needed strength through the Holy Ghost to help her friend face her challenges.
- In Carrie's ward, an elderly sister had an accident that caused her to lose her sight. Her world went

from colorful to dark in a matter of days. She became afraid to leave home, became increasingly isolated, and felt like a burden. Carrie asked herself, "What could we do to help her other senses experience joy?" Carrie baked a fresh loaf of bread and gathered up her children and their musical instruments to visit her friend. They sang songs and played music. They told jokes and listened to stories about this sister's childhood. Carrie's children still remember playing a concert for the "grandma who couldn't see us."

In each of these examples—and many, many others that occur every day all around the world—women were equipped to offer strength, comfort, and support by virtue of the talents and skills they had developed.

I am grateful for the sisters of strength and virtue around me who have blessed my life with their talents. I am grateful for the opportunity to search the scriptures and attend the temple to continually seek out greater understanding of God's plan of salvation and magnify my calling as a woman and a daughter of God. I am grateful that Jesus Christ's gospel teaches us that the greatest power and joy available to men or women come from loving God and serving others. ■

NOTES

1. John Gill, *Exposition of the Whole Bible* (1746–63), studylight.org.
2. See James Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (1984), "help" in main concordance, page 493; "ezer" (no. 5828) in Hebrew and Chaldee dictionary section, page 87.