

“Mothers, Mountains, and Miracles”
President’s Message, Young Women Open House, March 2006

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Commendation and Announcements

Since we last joined together in a pre-conference open house, we as a presidency have visited with young women all over the world. Everywhere we go we learn of their testimonies of and experiences with the Book of Mormon as they followed the prophet’s challenge to read it. Thank you for studying it with them and for helping them to each glean what they needed personally.

You are wonderful Young Women leaders. We sense the urgency of the important work you are about. There are Internet resources that we are providing which may help you be more effective in your callings. Many of you know about the interactive Personal Progress site. Now we have the Teaching Guide online, which can help you as you prepare Sunday lessons, as well as a new Mutual planning guide that follows up on the workshop last fall and leadership resources in conjunction with the workshop this spring.

Also, we hope you are aware of a letter that was sent in February to your priesthood leaders about the safety of all youth. Please discuss this with your bishop or stake president and decide how you will follow through on these safety guidelines.

In addition to the timely messages from general conference that you will wish to use and follow in your capacity as Young Women leaders, you will also want to study and utilize the wonderful information from the worldwide leadership training emphasizing the proclamation on the family. These messages are also online and will be published in the June *Ensign* and *Liahona*. I am grateful to our Church leaders for boldly teaching eternal truths concerning marriage and families. These are doctrines that young women must know, understand, and embrace.

Introduction

Children often quote their parents’ oft-repeated sayings like “remember who you are” or “return with honor.” My children will remember me saying often, “Has the day of miracles ceased?” Then I would quote to them the rest of those wonderful scriptures that I love from Moroni 7:35–37:

Has the day of miracles ceased? Or have angels ceased to appear unto the children of men? Or has he withheld the power of the Holy Ghost from them? . . . Behold I say unto you, Nay; for it is by faith that miracles are wrought.

I wanted my children to believe in miracles, exert their faith, pray for them, and look for them every day in their lives. I wanted them to know that angels can attend them.

My Mother Taught Me

My mother is a woman of great faith (and of course my father is right there with her). From my earliest years, Mom taught me to look for the “little miracles” in my life. By this she meant blessings from heaven, large or small. She prayed for them, expected them, looked for them, and gratefully testified of them.

I learned more about her kind of faith as I recently pondered a talk given to all CES personnel by Elder David A. Bednar. He reminded us that there are three basic elements of faith. He said:

Faith [is] the *assurance* of things hoped for which are true, . . . the *evidence* of things not seen, and . . . the principle of *action* in all intelligent beings. . . .

. . . These three elements of faith—assurance, action, and evidence—are not separate and discrete; rather, they are interrelated and continuous and cycle upward. And the faith that fuels this ongoing process develops and evolves and changes. [“Seek Learning by Faith,” address to CES religious educators, Feb. 3, 2006, 1–2; emphasis in original]

My mother’s teachings about having faith in little miracles followed this very pattern that Elder Bednar suggested. She *acted* on her righteous desires, exerting her faith, praying with her might. She was quick to recognize little miracles as works and blessings of God in our lives that we do not always fully understand, but definitely as *evidences* of the Lord’s unseen hand. And as she did so, she became more *assured* that she could continue to expect little miracles in her life and in our lives. She had faith that we can move forward with assurance because of the evidence of past blessings. One of my favorite lines from a hymn expresses this: “Thy God doth undertake to guide the future as he has the past” (“Be Still, My Soul,” *Hymns*, no. 124).

Just because one prays for miracles and exerts faith and expects them does not mean one is forcing the Lord’s hand. Miracles (or blessings) sometimes come from the Lord packaged far differently than we expect. For instance, I experienced many little miracles my first year at camp as the stake Young Women president, but they came packaged in very unexpected ways. When I first received this calling, my husband teased me that this meant that I would have to go to camp with the young women and sleep out in tents. Now, I love being out in nature, but whenever it comes time to crawl in a sleeping bag, I freeze. That aspect of camping is hard for me. Nevertheless, I cheerfully replied to my husband that I could do it, because unlike the young men, we did not have to go on winter camps.

That first year our camp was scheduled in June, and it happened to be a very wet and cold June. As the buses climbed the mountain to the campsite, a snowstorm set in. It was freezing.

One of the buses nearly slid off the road and down a mountain. The snow and cold continued for several days. It was a winter camp! And other hard things happened as well. Both of my counselors got really sick and had to go home. Several of our older girls (who should have been good youth leaders) ran away from camp one evening at dusk.

Yet in spite of these things, I came home glowing with the feelings of success. Overall, what we wanted to have happen, did. Our purpose was to have the young women learn to love and serve one another, getting past their immature cliques. We had planned activities and methods to help this happen. Instead the girls were put into a weather-related crisis mode. This, however, made them step up and unselfishly serve one another, almost for survival's sake. This was not how we had expected to achieve our goals. But Heavenly Father was blessing us even by a snowstorm. He always wants us to succeed in our righteous efforts with the young women. We had fasted, prayed, planned, prepared, and exerted our faith. The little miracles followed.

Scriptural Examples

I learned these same lessons my mom taught me about little miracles as I read in D&C 98:1–3:

Verily I say unto you my friends, fear not, let your hearts be comforted; yea, rejoice evermore, and in everything give thanks;

Waiting patiently on the Lord, for your prayers have entered into the ears of the Lord . . . and are recorded with this seal and testament—the Lord hath sworn and decreed that they shall be granted.

Therefore, he giveth this promise unto you, with an immutable covenant that they shall be fulfilled; and all things wherewith you have been afflicted shall work together for your good, and to my name's glory, saith the Lord.

I am grateful for my mom's teachings and for the faith and prayers that my parents always exerted in my behalf. I knew that my parents' prayers entered into the ears of the Lord. I knew I could expect little miracles.

Other mothers and fathers have exerted faith and prayers for their children, expecting miracles and finding them, even though it might have been in unexpected ways and often in the midst of their utmost extremity. There is the familiar and great example of the Ammonite mothers. They taught their sons that "if they did not doubt, God would deliver them" (Alma 56:47). And their sons were miraculously delivered during a very difficult battle.

There was not one soul of them who did perish; yea, and neither was there one soul among them who had not received many wounds.

And now, their preservation was astonishing to our whole army, yea, that they should be spared while there was a thousand of our brethren who were slain. And we do justly ascribe it to the miraculous power of God, because of their exceeding faith in that which they had been taught to believe—that there was a just God, and whosoever did not doubt, that they should be preserved by his marvelous power.
[Alma 57:25–26]

These wonderful mothers exerted their faith. Then they taught their sons to have faith and to obey with exactness. The sons marched forward with assurance because of the evidence of blessings and miracles that had come to their people in the past. And a great miracle followed, although not without many wounds and much loss of blood.

Joseph Smith’s mother, Lucy Mack Smith, was also a woman of great faith who acted upon it and expected miracles. When Joseph and Hyrum were traveling on Zion’s Camp they had many challenges. One of them was a terrible outbreak of cholera. They prayed several times to be healed. Finally Joseph said to the men that they must stay on their knees until someone among them had an assurance that they would be healed. Finally Hyrum had this vision:

“ ‘Joseph, we shall return, for I have seen an open vision in which I saw Mother on her knees under an apple tree praying for us, and she is even now asking God, in tears, to spare our lives, that she may behold us again in the flesh. The Spirit testifies to me that her prayers and ours shall be heard’—and from that moment we were healed and went on our way rejoicing.”

When they returned home Joseph told his mother of this experience and then added: “ ‘Oh, my mother, . . . how often have your prayers been a means of assisting us when the shadows of death encompassed us!’ ” (quoted in Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, ed. Scot Facer Proctor and Maurine Jensen Proctor [1996], 319).

In another wonderful Book of Mormon example, a father, Helaman, taught his sons Nephi and Lehi to have faith in Jesus Christ, to do His works, and to build upon His rock as their sure foundation. Then when the challenges, the winds, the shafts in the whirlwind, and the mighty storms came they could stand firm and steadfast. (See Helaman 5:12.) These two brothers served a wonderful mission among the Lamanites, “insomuch that there were eight thousand of the Lamanites who were . . . baptized unto repentance” (verse 19). It was a great miracle.

But when they moved onward to their next area they were cast into prison and went for many days without food. When they were about to be slain, Heavenly Father protected them. They “were as standing in the midst of fire and were not burned” (Helaman 5:23). Fear and darkness overshadowed all of the other people in prison. They wondered how to dispel this darkness, and learned it could only happen through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. When they did this they were filled with unspeakable joy from the Holy Spirit (verses 44–45), and “they saw the heavens open; and angels came down out of heaven and ministered unto them” (verse 48).

These two great missionaries were taught by their father to exert faith in Jesus Christ. The miracles came in the midst of their extremity. They learned from their father the lessons I learned from my parents: that the day of miracles has not ceased, and angels still minister unto men.

Mothers and Leaders as an Integral Part of the Miracles

Mothers and fathers are often a very real part of the miracles. Faithful parents teach their children by precept and example. They have faith, love, and courage. They pray, sacrifice, live on promises, create holy places for their families. President Boyd K. Packer said that the shield of faith is best forged in the cottage industry of home by faithful parents:

This shield of faith is handmade in a cottage industry. What is most worth doing ideally is done at home. It can be polished in the classroom, but it is fabricated and fitted in the home, handcrafted to each individual.

Many do not have support in the family. When that shield is not provided at home, we must, and we can, build it. You and the leaders and teachers then become the first line of defense. [“The One Pure Defense,” address to CES religious educators, Feb. 6, 2004, 4]

But since so many youth do not have families in the Church, he reminded leaders that they need to step up and assist. If parents are so important, and they are, to building faith in their children, what can we do as leaders to support and strengthen parents in their roles? Please prayerfully ponder that question. As it says in 3 Nephi, “go ye unto your homes and *ponder* upon the things which I have said, and *ask* of the Father, in my name, that ye may *understand*, and *prepare* your minds” (3 Nephi 17:3; emphasis added). We need to ponder, pray, and ask ourselves what we can do as leaders to strengthen the parents and their daughters.

Is there anyone who needs miracles, who needs angels attending them, who needs holy experiences as much as young women? How can we assist them to both live for and recognize the little miracles of the Lord’s love in their lives? As leaders we need to think about every venue we have with our young women as an opportunity to create a holy place, a place set apart from the world, a place where they feel and learn something they won’t get anywhere else, where they come to feel the Spirit, where they come to recognize the Lord’s hand in their lives.

Mountaintop Experiences

Often my counselors and I say that if we could only have one aspect of our Young Women program, it would be camp. Why? Because all over world, girls tell us that it is what made the difference in their testimonies.

Why does camp have such a profound effect? I think there are several reasons. We work together with our priesthood leaders to plan with the appropriate needed purpose. We prepare so well both spiritually and temporally for this experience. Then we provide a place which is holy and set apart from the world for a brief time. Often, around here at least, that place is in the mountains. Let's talk for a few minutes about mountains.

I love mountains. I have hiked in the Wasatch range and other mountains in the United States—also in England and in the Holy Land. In the beauties of nature I sense God's great love for me. I gain a perspective on my fundamental purposes in life. I build loving relationships with my hiking friends.

Now think of the important role of mountains in the scriptures. What holy things have happened on mountaintops?

Mount Moriah: Abraham's sacrifice; angel attended (Genesis 22:2, 11).

Mount of Temptation: Savior learned obedience; angels attended (Matthew 4:8–11).

Mount Sinai: The Ten Commandments (Exodus 19–20); God speaks face to face (Moses 1:1–2).

Mount Carmel: Elijah's contest with the priests of Baal; God showed his miraculous power (1 Kings 18:20, 37–39).

High Mount in Book of Mormon: Nephi carried away to high mountain in a vision (1 Nephi 11:1).

Hill Cumorah: Angel Moroni restored plates containing the Book of Mormon record (Joseph Smith—History 1:51, 54, 59).

Mount of Transfiguration: Priesthood keys conferred; angels appeared (Matthew 17:1–9).

What happened on these mountains? These were all settings for holy experiences, life-changing experiences—places where righteous individuals came to an understanding of God's laws and commandments; where they had communication with God and angels; where they made covenants, sacrificed, and had revelations and visions; where they witnessed miracles.

This could only happen in a holy place set apart from the world. Your "mountains" can be in many settings such as churches, homes, temples, your own room. Each of these can be a holy place. In such a setting a young woman can learn:

1. To understand her *identity*. She is a daughter of God for whom He has created this beautiful world (see D&C 59:18).
2. To recognize and rely on the *Spirit*. She will feel it through the beauties of nature, singing hymns, taking time to be still and meditative, and bearing testimony.
3. To keep *covenants*. She will serve others, strengthen relationships, and stand as a witness of God.
4. To *prepare*. She will increase in knowledge, skills, and talents that will bless and strengthen home, family, and others.

Replicate Mountaintop Experiences in All Young Women Venues

Our young women need mountaintop experiences not just once a year, but every time we meet with them. Satan and his messages are relentlessly infiltrating and bombarding young women every day and on every side. We have to provide places of refuge to fortify these noble girls. We can replicate the good we do at camp in all of our lessons and activities, if they are done with the right purpose, preparation, and spirit. The event does not have to be grandiose.

Even small events can provide needed little miracles in their lives. When I was a Laurel adviser, I sensed a need for the girls in my class to have some places away from the pressures of the world. They were busy, involved girls who went many different directions. So I chose a simple plan, designed to not take too much of their time. I instituted “bread day” at my house once a week during their lunch break. My home was near the high school, so it was quick and easy to get to it. I had hot bread coming out of the oven when they arrived. For 25 minutes they could leave behind the world of academic demands, unclean language, peer pressures, cliques, and all other worldliness. The wholesome bread was symbolic of the wholesome spirit I tried to provide. It was a tiny, simple way for me to follow the impressions of the Spirit to create a “place set apart” for a small moment.

An important aspect of creating these mountaintop experiences is using our youth to help lead. Why should we use youth leaders? President Boyd K. Packer taught mission presidents to use their missionary leaders to help in many ways. He said:

I can see . . . the missionary leaders with the power that they have. There are some parts of this missionary work that they can do much better than you can do. I learned that as a mission president, when I marveled at the way they solved some problems quite differently than I might have approached them. I could see the power of youth in them and how they could help and train the missionaries who were under our direction. [“Counsel with a Promise,” address at mission presidents’ seminar, June 21, 2005, 1]

I think we can liken this to our young women as they serve each other. Using them not only helps them develop and grow, but it also frees you to carry on with three of your most important responsibilities as Young Women leaders:

1. To build caring relationships—one of the keys to helping a girl make transitions to adult activity in the Church, to going to Relief Society.
2. To teach truths and doctrines and their application in the lives of the girls.
3. To exhibit and teach faith, learning to recognize the Lord’s hand in our lives.

After each experience we should immediately begin evaluating. What good happened? How can we build on this? What do we want to have happen next time? Are we counting our blessings, seeing Heavenly Father’s hand in our work, recognizing the little miracles?

Hopes and Prayers for Young Women

I hope each girl will come off her mountaintop experiences in Young Women as Moses did, a changed person: “the skin of Moses’ face shone” (Exodus 34:29, 35). Will they know who they are? Will they have felt the Spirit? Will they keep their covenants? Will they be prepared to stand strong in this difficult world? We can make a difference if we are leaders with faith, vision, love, courage, prayers. We can expect miracles.

I have a prayer for each young woman as she has these holy moments with us that she will say as Moses said, the “Spirit [has] not altogether withdrawn from me.” “I can judge between [God] and [Satan].” “I will not cease to call upon God.” “Depart hence, Satan.” Then she can be “filled with the Holy Ghost” and know that the “Almighty [has] chosen [her]” for a great work. (Moses 1:15, 18, 24–25.) I know that Heavenly Father using your help can make it happen. I know that we can “fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them” (2 Kings 6:16). We have angels attending us.

Testimony of Miracles

I now conclude with my testimony that angels do attend us and the day of miracles has not ceased. In the past several weeks I have been in a holy place with my daughter who just had miracle twins. Soon after she discovered that she was expecting two babies, the doctors determined through many tests that they were high-risk twins, developing in the same sac, with a mortality rate of 20 to 60 percent. The normal care in this case is automatic hospitalization at 24 weeks so the babies can constantly be monitored. Immediately we all started praying for miracles, whatever that meant. The priesthood blessings she received from her husband gave her great comfort.

Three months into the pregnancy she saw the specialist for the first time. He repeated all the grim news, then he did yet another ultrasound. He saw a faint membrane, which meant the babies were developing in two sacs. Our Becky called me in tears and said, “People can explain it however they want, but I know it’s the miracle we’ve been praying for.” There were still other uncertainties and complications, but we had evidence that Heavenly Father had heard and answered our prayers. Of course we exerted our faith and prayers for further miracles. The doctors who have followed her through have expressed complete awe that everything has been so flawless in spite of so many potential medical problems. Two healthy little girls were born into our family in March, and a celestial spirit has permeated this holy home.

Because I have been exerting my faith for a personal need in a mighty way, I have come to see the Lord’s hand blessing me, not only in that, but in my Young Women work as well. There was a time period a short while ago where everything about our Young Women work seemed difficult. Of course I was striving to receive revelation, to be a pure vessel, and to carry on.

One particular day in the midst of the challenges, I was praying that one of my daughters would feel angels attending her that day for reasons she needed. I never had a chance to talk to her then, but all that day *I* had little miracles in my life, culminating in an unplanned priesthood interview where I knew words of comfort and guidance were put in my priesthood leader's mouth by the Spirit. I knew that *I* was being attended to by angels that day. It was so real and obvious to me.

Later in the week I talked to my daughter, and I asked her how that hard day had gone for her. She said that nothing miraculous had happened, except that she had felt almost an uncanny strength to get through it. I stopped her and said, "That was the miracle—not necessarily what you had expected, but just what you needed—an uncanny ability to just make it through."

Just as I tried to point out the miracles to my daughter, I have tried to recognize them in my own life. At the same time we learned of Becky's prospective hospitalization, we learned that my May international trip had been changed to February, which would make it problematic for me to give her much-needed help. I felt promptings from the Spirit that I should do the trip and not try to reassign it to someone else. So I trusted, albeit sometimes falteringly. When I stepped off the plane three weeks ago, I knew this was the day I had prayed for, exerted my faith for, for eight months—that my daughter would not have the babies before I returned and could be available to help her. Our blessings have been innumerable. Maybe no other single experience of my life has had such a profound influence on my faith.

The words to my husband's hymn, number 138, have been constantly in my mind:

As witnesses, we gather here
To thank, and to attest
Of mercies and of miracles—
Oh, still our lives so bless!
["Bless Our Fast, We Pray," *Hymns*, no. 138]

I do witness of mercies and miracles in our lives. As my mother taught me, we must teach our young women. Heavenly Father knows us. He loves us. He wants us to exert our faith, and He hears and answers our prayers in the ways that will work for our good.

Fear not, let your hearts be comforted . . . for your prayers have entered into the ears of the Lord . . . [and] he giveth this promise unto you, . . . that they shall be fulfilled; and all things wherewith you have been afflicted shall work together for your good. [D&C 98:1–3]