



WOMEN'S TOPICS FOR
INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS

Relief Society: A Restoration of an Ancient Pattern





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This course of study is based on sermons and talks given by latter-day apostles and prophets and by Church auxiliary leaders. The course may also include articles written by professionals, such as clinical therapists, or by members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who have valuable personal experiences to share. This course of study contains two groups of lessons: (1) lessons for gospel study based on talks given by Church leaders, and (2) lessons based on chapters of the book *Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society* (2011).

Gospel Study

Charity Never Faileth
First Observe, Then Serve
Forget Me Not
Is Faith in the Atonement of Jesus Christ Written in Our Hearts?
Raised in Hope
Sharing Your Light
Sisterhood: Oh, How We Need Each Other
The Savior's Respect for Women
The Words We Speak
This Is a Test. It Is Only a Test.
Wanted: Hands and Hearts to Hasten the Work
We Have Great Reason to Rejoice

Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society

Relief Society: A Restoration of an Ancient Pattern
"Something Better": The Female Relief Society of Nauvoo
"Cleave unto the Covenants": Exodus, Migration, and Settlement
"A Wide and Extensive Sphere of Action"
"Charity Never Faileth"
A Worldwide Circle of Sisterhood
"Pure Religion": Watchcare and Ministering through Visiting Teaching
Blessings of the Priesthood for All: An Inseparable Connection with the Priesthood
"Guardians of the Hearth": Establishing, Nurturing, and Defending the Family
"Live Up to Your Privilege"

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THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS



Relief Society: A Restoration of an Ancient Pattern

FROM *DAUGHTERS IN MY KINGDOM: THE HISTORY AND WORK OF RELIEF SOCIETY*

Throughout His mortal ministry, the Savior showed special love and concern for women. Elder James E. Talmage of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, “The world’s greatest champion of woman and womanhood is Jesus the Christ.”¹

The Savior taught women in multitudes and as individuals, on the street and by the seashore, at the well and in their homes. He showed loving-kindness toward them and healed them and their family members. In many parables, He told stories of women engaged in ordinary activities. He demonstrated deep familiarity with women’s lives and drew timeless gospel lessons from their everyday experiences. He forgave them. He wept with them. He had compassion on them in their specific circumstances as daughters, wives, homemakers, mothers, and widows. He appreciated them and ennobled them.

Even in excruciating pain on the cross, the Savior expressed concern for His mother, who by then was very likely a widow in need of watchcare (see John 19:25–27). And the first person to whom He appeared after His Resurrection was a woman (see John 20:1–18).

Female disciples in the New Testament

While little is known about a formal organization of women in the New Testament, evidence suggests that women were vital participants in the Savior’s ministry. The New Testament includes accounts of women, named and unnamed, who exercised faith

in Jesus Christ, learned and lived His teachings, and testified of His ministry, miracles, and majesty. These women became exemplary disciples and important witnesses in the work of salvation.

Women journeyed with Jesus and His Twelve Apostles. They gave of their substance to assist in His ministry. After His death and Resurrection, women continued to be faithful disciples. They met and prayed together with the Apostles. They provided their homes as gathering places for Church members. They valiantly participated in the work of saving souls, temporally and spiritually.



“Martha received [Jesus] into her house.” Her sister Mary “sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard his word” (Luke 10:38–39). Detail from *Mary Heard His Word*, by Walter Rane. © 2001 IRI.

Mary and Martha served the Lord Jesus Christ

Martha and her sister Mary are examples of female disciples in the New Testament. 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 (see Luke 10:38–42).

Mary and Martha became active participants in the Lord's mortal ministry. Later in the New Testament, we read Martha's strong testimony of the Savior's divinity. In a conversation with Jesus, she said, "I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world" (see John 11:20–27).



Throughout His mortal ministry, the Savior showed special love and concern for women. Detail from *Living Water*, by Simon Dewey. © Simon Dewey.

Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna traveled with Jesus

Many other female disciples traveled with Jesus and the Twelve, learning from Him spiritually and serving Him temporally. Luke recorded:

"And it came to pass afterward, that he [Jesus] went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him,

"And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils,

"And Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance" (Luke 8:1–3).

Do It Yourself

On a separate sheet of paper, draw a picture of Martha, Mary, Joanna, Tabitha, Lydia, or another woman discussed in this chapter. Or write a short paragraph about one of them. Use your drawing or paragraph to remind you to be a disciple of Christ.



It is likely that these women provided some economic support for Jesus [Christ] and His Apostles, along with service such as cooking. In addition to receiving Jesus's ministering—the glad tidings of His gospel and the blessings of His healing power—these women ministered to Him, imparting their substance and devotion.

Paul wrote about women who served others and taught each other

The Apostle Paul wrote of women who, both in Church positions and of their own volition, served the Saints. His description of a righteous widow identified characteristics of many women in the early Church: "Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work" (1 Timothy 5:10). Paul also wrote of the influence of wise, experienced older women. He counseled Titus to encourage older women to serve and teach young women about their eternal roles as wives and mothers, "that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children" (Titus 2:4).



Tabitha made clothing for the poor and needy

The book of Acts includes an account of a woman who embodied the virtues Paul described. Tabitha, who was also known as Dorcas, lived in Joppa, where she made clothes for women in need.



Tabitha “was full of good works and almsdeeds” (Acts 9:36). *Tabitha Sewing*, by Jeremy Winborg. © Jeremy Winborg.

“Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.

“And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died. . . .

“And forasmuch as [the city of] Lydda was nigh Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them.

“Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, . . . all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.

“But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up” (Acts 9:36–40).

Although the name [Relief Society] may be of modern date, the institution is of ancient origin. We were told by our martyred prophet that the same organization existed in the church anciently.

Eliza R. Snow

Priscilla, Mary, Lydia, and Phebe served the Church

The New Testament mentions other devoted women. Priscilla and her husband, Aquila, risked their lives for the Apostles and provided their home for Church gatherings (see Romans 16:3–5). Paul wrote, “Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is *in their house*” (1 Corinthians 16:19; italics added).

A woman named Mary “bestowed much labour” for the Apostles (Romans 16:6). A woman named Lydia was baptized along with her household and then ministered to those who had taught her (see Acts 16:14–15).

A woman named Phebe apparently held an ecclesiastical position of service in her congregation. Paul said, “I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is *a servant of the church* . . . that ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been *a succourer of many*” (Romans 16:1–2; italics added). The kind of service rendered by Phebe and other great women of the New Testament continues today with members of the Relief Society—leaders, visiting teachers, mothers, and others—who act as succorers, or helpers, of many.

Female disciples in the latter days

The women in the ancient Church were dignified and noble, needed and valued. They served others, increased in personal holiness, and participated in the great work of saving souls.



These patterns have been restored in the latter days through the organization of the Relief Society. The Prophet Joseph Smith declared, "The Church was never perfectly organized until the women were thus organized."² Sister Eliza R. Snow, the second Relief Society general president, reiterated this teaching. She said: "Although the name may be of modern date, the institution is of ancient origin. We were told by our martyred prophet that the same organization existed in the church anciently."³

Besides Joseph Smith, other latter-day prophets have testified that the organization of Relief Society is an inspired part of the Restoration, whereby women in the Church are called in ecclesiastical positions to serve one another and to bless the entire Church. President Joseph F. Smith, the sixth President of the Church, said, "This organization is divinely made, divinely authorized, divinely instituted, divinely ordained of God to minister for the salvation of the souls of women and of men."⁴ To a group of Relief Society sisters, President Lorenzo Snow, the fifth President of the Church, said: "You have ever been found at the side of the Priesthood, ready to strengthen their hands and to do your part in helping to advance the interests of the kingdom of God; and as you have shared in these labors, so you will most certainly share in the triumph of the work and in the exaltation and glory which the Lord will give to His faithful children."⁵

As women participate in Relief Society, they serve as valiant disciples of Jesus Christ in the work of salvation. Like the women in the ancient Church, they work alongside men who hold the priesthood to increase faith and personal righteousness, strengthen families and homes, and seek out and help those in need. Sister Julie B. Beck, the fifteenth Relief Society general president, taught: "Through Relief Society we practice being disciples of Christ. We learn what He would have us learn, we do what He would have us do, and we become what He would have us become."⁶

[Note: Subheadings were added or altered in this chapter. Scripture references were moved from the endnotes into the text of the chapter.]

Endnotes

1. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 3rd ed. (1916), 475.
2. Joseph Smith, quoted in Sarah M. Kimball, "Auto-biography," *Woman's Exponent*, Sept. 1, 1883, 51; see also *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 451.
3. Eliza R. Snow, "Female Relief Society," *Deseret News*, Apr. 22, 1868, 1; punctuation standardized.
4. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* (1998), 184.
5. Lorenzo Snow, in "Prest. Snow to Relief Societies," *Deseret Evening News*, July 9, 1901, 1.
6. Julie B. Beck, "What Latter-day Saint Women Do Best: Stand Strong and Immovable," *Ensign*, Nov. 2007, 109.



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RESPONSE FORM

1. What evidence do you have from the New Testament of Jesus Christ's compassion for women and their individual needs? What do these stories mean to you personally?

2. In the story of Mary and Martha, how did the Savior include these women in spiritual events and spiritual discussions? What does this story teach you about Jesus Christ's desire for women to be involved in spiritual matters?

3. What do the stories of women in the New Testament teach you about the service women can provide to their fellow human beings?



4. What similarities do you see between the ancient pattern pertaining to women in the New Testament and the pattern of the Relief Society in the latter days?

5. Now and in the future, how can you participate in the worldwide sisterhood of the Relief Society? How is this participation an important part of your personal growth?

6. What else have you learned in this lesson that you would like to share?

Name: _____ **Offender #:** _____

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