

A Noble Responsibility for Good

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To begin, you need to know the most important thing about me: I believe in God. I believe in God and in His Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. My remarks are grounded in my faith.

Have you ever read a sentence that immediately spoke to you? This happened to me about eight years ago when I was called to serve as our stake Young Women president. I felt rather inadequate in this calling. You see, I did not grow up as a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I was baptized a member when I was twenty-three years old, so I had not participated in the Young Women program. And yet I was asked to lead the program for our stake. At that time a focus of the Young Women program was the completion of Personal Progress, a goal-setting program to encourage service and to enhance personal and spiritual growth. I visited wards to encourage Personal Progress participation and celebrate advancements. As I had not participated in Personal Progress as a youth, I decided to complete the eight value projects as a leader. I got my

own hard-copy Personal Progress book and began reading in the welcome section—and there was my sentence. The second sentence in the Personal Progress welcome section read, “You have a noble responsibility to use your strength and influence for good.”¹

That sentence captures my personal philosophy and is the topic of this devotional. It is a powerful message not just for young women but for all of us. Let’s dive into this sentence together by discussing the sentence in three sections: “a noble responsibility,” “strength and influence,” and what is meant by “for good.”

“A Noble Responsibility”

First consider the phrase “a noble responsibility.” The word *noble* describes you and me. As a child of God, you are a noble entity. I believe that knowledge must be part of who we are—part of how we see our potential. When we truly understand that we are noble, we should feel capable, inspired, and powerful. So adjust in your seat and

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sit up a little taller as a noble being as we discuss our responsibilities.

As children of God, we have responsibilities. We are commanded to “love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:39). This is one of our greatest responsibilities. Ponder: Who are your neighbors? Look around you. Think of your friends and family. Scroll through your social media feed (well, not right now). And then consider, Who is not represented in your circle? Our neighbors must also include individuals who are not in our circle, those who may be facing discrimination or feelings of not belonging: minorities, individuals who identify as LGBTQ, individuals with disabilities, the homeless. The list is long of people who face discrimination.

When Christ was asked, “And who is my neighbour?” (Luke 10:29), He shared the parable of the good Samaritan, in which a Samaritan stopped to help a beaten, injured Jewish man—a man who was not in the Samaritan’s circle. In September 2018, D. Carolina Núñez shared a BYU devotional message entitled “Loving Our Neighbors.” In it she beautifully described who we should consider as our neighbors:

Our neighbors are not the people who are most like us; rather, our neighbors are those who are different from us. They are the people whom our own social circles have rejected. They are our brothers and sisters who worship differently than we do, who come from different backgrounds, who look different from us, who make different choices than we do, who have dreams and goals that differ from ours, who disagree with us, or who have despised us.²

With this loving description in mind, consider again, Who is your neighbor?

Our Church doctrine describes our divine responsibilities as “living the gospel of Jesus Christ,” “caring for those in need,” “inviting all to receive the gospel,” and “uniting families for eternity.”³ My focus is on the second responsibility: “caring for those in need.” Who do you know who is in need? If the first thought that came into your mind was *everyone*, then you are absolutely correct. We are all in need. Our needs vary, but we need one another.

“Strength and Influence”

The phrase “strength and influence” directs us to the tools we need to fulfill our noble responsibility to care for others. We need strength—to be strong for ourselves and for others. How do we feel strong and become stronger? I believe the first step is to truly internalize our nobility and heritage as children of God. There is great empowerment from this knowledge. The second step is to reach out to the Lord and pray for His sustaining strength. The Lord wants us to be strong to carry out our noble responsibilities, so He stands ready to strengthen us. In Isaiah 41:10 we read, “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee.” Do you feel Him next to you? I pray that you do. I pray that you feel the Lord walking hand in hand with you in your life as a constant source of strength. And if you do not feel the Lord next to you, know that He is there—you simply need to reach out to Him.

Let’s jump to talking about our influence. When I was in junior high, I had a couple of good friends who were members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Suzy and Dene. Travel back in your mind to your junior high experiences. I don’t know about you, but my wonderful group of friends sometimes had ill feelings toward each other for seemingly minor slights that seemed huge at the time. During one of these times, I observed Suzy and Dene acting as the peacemakers in our group. They worked together in healing a rift between two good friends, even quoting Christ’s words in Matthew 18:22 to forgive “seventy times seven.” I remembered that experience. Fast forward to ten years later, when I was receiving the missionary discussions. This memory of Suzy and Dene flooded into my mind. Their actions as thirteen-year-old girls influenced my decision to be baptized a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. And they had no idea of their powerful influence in my life until many years later when I could thank them.

We influence others every day in small and simple ways. Don’t ever believe that you do not have a profound impact or influence in this world. You do—in ways you likely do not fully understand. We should continually be thinking of how we are using our influence.

“For Good”

For the remainder of our time together, I want to address what is meant by “for good.”

When our son Grant was four-and-a-half years old, he came home from church with a “choose the right” ring—one of the adjustable little rings with a CTR crest. Grant was ecstatic. He showed it to his brothers and sisters. His dad and I chuckled at how much he loved this little ring. Well, shortly after church Grant lost the ring at home. He was despondent. A couple of days later, as I was cleaning the family room, I found Grant’s CTR ring under a couch cushion. Grant was so happy to have his ring back! Not much later, as Grant and his little brother Noah were playing upstairs, I heard a thud and then Noah crying. My practiced mother’s ears knew that those sounds meant Grant, normally a very kind child, had shoved Noah into a wall.

As I got upstairs, I found Noah whimpering a little but not hurt and moving on to play. But Grant was sobbing and pulling off the ring on his finger. He threw the CTR ring down the hall with all his little boy might and through tears yelled, “That thing does not work!”

I sat on the floor and gathered Grant into my arms and asked, “Did you think that if you wore that ring that you would only choose the right?”

He nodded, “Yes.”

I then said, “Oh, sweet boy, it doesn’t work that way. Heavenly Father gave us the greatest gift in that we can choose how we act and what we do. The CTR ring is a reminder, but you choose.”

You choose. When we consider what is meant by “for good,” we get to choose. What a beautiful gift of choice the Lord has given to us!

We then must consider, How do we choose? I have read President Dallin H. Oaks’s talk “Good, Better, Best” many times in my life. President Oaks stated:

We should begin by recognizing . . . that just because something is good is not a sufficient reason for doing it. The number of good things we can do far exceeds the time available to accomplish them. Some things are better than good, and these are the things that should command priority attention in our lives.⁴

When President Oaks gave this talk in 2007, I immediately identified with his message, as I had had an epiphany on this topic about nine years earlier around midnight in my laundry room. I had recently had our sixth child and was feeling very inadequate, with a messy house, a career placed on the back burner, and so much left to do. As I was sorting socks and feeling overwhelmed with my lengthy, undone to-do list, I thought to myself that I could stay up all night and I still wouldn’t finish my to-do list. And then the thought burst into my mind: maybe there was nothing wrong with me; maybe there was something wrong with my list. I stopped sorting socks and went to bed praying that God would help me decide what I should accomplish each day “for good.”

Well, that was the last day I sorted my kids’ socks. I determined that their sorting their own socks was a great life skill and that it was just fine to wear two different socks. I changed my to-do list to an accomplishment list to focus on my priorities. I also started creating a new list: my selected neglect list. This list contains good stuff, not the prioritized best stuff; it contains items that I have consciously chosen to neglect for now. In choosing my priorities, I have pondered on President Oaks’s advice to base our priorities on gospel principles and strengthening our families, not on socks.

So let’s get back to the topic of how we choose what is our “for good” after understanding the need to prioritize, choose, and neglect. One’s stage of life certainly influences the choice of what is “for good.” In Ecclesiastes 3:1 we learn, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” To me, this verse reinforces our need to be intentional in our decisions while acknowledging the differing seasons in our lives. As a university student, a strong component of your “for good” is investing in yourself through your education and experiences. Use your strength to learn and to grow. Investing in yourself reflects self-love and self-worth. Remember, the second commandment to “love thy neighbour as thyself” affirms that we are to love ourselves. Be good to yourself by investing in your education, talents, skills, and relationships.

We may find that our professional lives influence our “for good.” This is what happened to me. I am a forensic nurse. Over the past sixteen years I have provided nursing care for individuals impacted by violence—child abuse, elder abuse, sexual assault, and domestic violence—primarily caring for people who have been raped. When I first started on this career path, I was horrified at the huge number of individuals suffering these abuses and their lasting trauma. Today I am still horrified. As I cared for seemingly endless numbers of patients, I thought, “I have to do something to change this.” I started asking questions: What happens to my patients after they leave my care? How many of these sexual assault kits are tested? What are the DNA results from the kits? How many rape cases are prosecuted? What can we learn about these crimes to reduce sexual violence in our society? I found that my questions did not have answers, as we simply did not know. For the most part it was vital information that was not being tracked or collected.

I became committed to doing research specifically on sexual assault to try to make a difference—to work toward decreasing sexual violence and improving survivor support. My “for good” meant that I had to complete a PhD degree, which was a challenging task with my large family but doable because of the immense support of my wonderful husband, Mark, and the strength I prayed for and felt from the Lord.

To accomplish my “for good,” I have collaborated and networked with amazing colleagues, organizations, students, and fellow nurses equally committed to decreasing sexual violence and to improving care given to survivors. My research team and I have collected data on more than ten thousand patients seen for sexual assault medical forensic examinations in the Mountain West region of the United States. Our research focus areas include studies on vulnerabilities for sexual assault, domestic violence rapes, male rape victims, adolescent rape victims, elderly rape victims, dating app–facilitated sexual assaults, injuries following sexual assaults, submission rates of sexual assault kits, DNA analysis findings from sexual assault kits, the development of a machine-learning model to guide DNA analysis, and several

other topics. We are keenly aware that each of our data points represents a person impacted by sexual violence. We believe that by aggregating and analyzing this data, we provide a powerful voice for survivors and justice.

In my work I have felt the enabling strength of the Lord. I pray for guidance as I conduct research to inform practice and policy. And, most important, I pray for inspiration as I care for my individual patients—“the one.” That inspiration, the guiding thoughts I have received while caring for my patients, has been the most meaningful. I felt the Lord with me as I comforted a woman who had been assaulted, beaten to unconsciousness, and left for dead. I felt the Lord with me as I held the hand of and listened to a transgender patient who had been raped because of his gender identity—the victim of a hate crime. I have felt the Lord with me as I have struggled to know the right words of comfort to say to many patients who have been sexually assaulted by individuals they thought were their friends. Their feelings of hurt, shock, and betrayal are overwhelming. I have felt the Lord with me as I have sat with patients who were fearful of reporting their abuses for fear of retaliation or of not being believed.

I felt the Lord inspire my care decisions with one of my patients, a homeless woman with drug addictions who was working as a prostitute to survive. She had been raped and abused since she was a little child. She had been found on the streets after yet another rape and brought to the emergency room. As someone who had been marginalized for most of her life, she was anxious in the emergency room and distrustful of me and other first responders. She was most distraught about her feet. You see, she had been without shoes for two weeks, and her feet were caked with dirt and grime. I realized that the most important first act for me to do for this patient was to lovingly wash and lotion her feet. After this simple act of washing her feet, her countenance changed to trusting me and then receiving care. For many of my patients, I am with them during the worst time of their lives. Yet some of my patients have experienced a lifetime of trauma and abuses. In my work, there seems to be a never-ending amount of despair, brutality, and pain.

While I am immersed in great trauma and sadness, I am also equally surrounded by tremendous light and beauty. I witness compassion, altruism, caring, dedication, and love in my family, colleagues, friends, and students. In my patients, I oftentimes see resiliency, strength, and hope. In 2 Nephi 2:11 we are taught, “For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things.” I have learned to acknowledge both the good and the bad within this world as described in 2 Nephi 2. This chapter is my conversion chapter. When I was reading the Book of Mormon for the first time, I found that the knowledge I held in my heart about the gospel of Jesus Christ was written down in this powerful chapter. I believe that “men are, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25). As we act as disciples of Christ, we can foster joy in this world by reaching out to others in love.

As I share experiences of my work with survivors of sexual assault and intimate partner violence, I am very aware that many survivors will hear these words. I know the numbers. Sadly, worldwide and in the United States, one in three women will experience sexual or intimate partner violence in her lifetime.⁵ Although women are impacted to a greater extent, findings in the United States indicate one in four men also experience intimate partner or sexual violence.⁶

To survivors, I have a message to share specifically with you. I pray that you understand that healing is a long process and is different for every individual. Be kind and patient with yourself. I pray that you believe in your nobility as a child of God. I pray that you know that you are loved by your Heavenly Father, who sees your unlimited worth and beauty. I pray that you feel surrounded by the healing and hope extended by our Savior, Jesus Christ, and His Atonement. I pray that you receive strength from others who love you. I pray that you grow in your ability to feel strong and empowered, to heal, and to bloom. I frequently share with my patients a little card with the word *bloom* and a photo of crocus flowers. Reflect on the image of crocus flowers, the first flowers to bloom in the spring. Just as the crocus flowers bloom after a long, cold, and dark winter, may you emerge from your pain and suffering to bloom and share your beauty with the world.

We all share in the responsibility to help survivors and others bloom. May we use our influence and strength to uplift, sustain, and heal one another. Small, seemingly insignificant actions such as saying, “I am there for you” or “You matter to me,” or just sitting in companionable silence all make a difference. May we reflect God’s love to those who have forgotten what they are capable of and who they are.

I am often asked how I can do this difficult work of caring for individuals impacted by violence. My response is, “How can I not?” I can do this work because I believe that I have a noble responsibility to use my strength and influence for good. My “for good” is working to decrease sexual and intimate partner violence. My “for good” is clear in my mind and guides my daily actions and future goals.

What is your “for good” at this time in your life? You also have a noble responsibility to use your strength and influence for good. You get to choose your “for good.” Ponder and pray upon this choice at different stages throughout your life. Be intentional in choosing your priorities, actions, and goals. The Lord will be right there by your side to strengthen you. Always remember that the world and the Lord need you. In the name of our loving Savior, Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. *Young Women Personal Progress: Standing as a Witness of God* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2009), 1.

2. D. Carolina Núñez, “Loving Our Neighbors,” BYU devotional address, 18 September 2018.

3. “The Work of Salvation and Exaltation,” *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, July 2021 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ, 2021), 1.2 (p. 17), churchofjesuschrist.org.

4. Dallin H. Oaks, “Good, Better, Best,” *Ensign*, November 2007; emphasis in original.

5. See “Violence Against Women,” Fact Sheets, World Health Organization, 9 March 2021, [who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women).

6. See “Preventing Sexual Violence,” Violence Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021, [cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/fastfact.html](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/fastfact.html).