



Listening to Women—or Listening Through the Narrative We Prefer?

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What does it mean to listen to women in faith communities? It means discerning voice from ideological demand.

The topic of listening to women recently made the rounds again in the online Latter-day Saint world as a result of a post by historian and podcaster Jared Halverson of Unshaken Saints. In the original post, Halverson, discussing [D&C 25](#), lamented that women are leaving churches in higher numbers than men, and stated that women are “important in the kingdom of God” and, like Emma Smith, should “lay aside the things of this world.”

While many women found his video deeply validating and powerful, others found it insensitive to the concerns of the women who leave the Church, especially those who do so

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because of issues related to gender. The most common sentiment in those comments was a call for Halverson and other men in the Church (including the male church leadership) to “listen to women.” Halverson subsequently posted a middle-of-the-night “apology for causing pain” and appeared on the Faith Matters podcast discussing matters of gender with a group of Latter-day Saint women, who largely seemed sympathetic to the women who didn’t like his video.

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What would it mean for him and other men in the Church to “listen to women”? Listening is often rightly urged in public discourse—understanding the perspectives of others *is* important. But often what is really meant is not “you’re not listening to me,” but “you’re not agreeing with me.”

As Allyson Flake Matsoso has [written](#) previously in an article aptly titled “What Love Isn’t”:

Without disagreement, there would be no need for tolerance. But now, tolerance has come to mean simply: accept what I believe or do as good and valid. Yet *validation is not true tolerance*. Let’s keep the disagreement in the definition of tolerance. If we still hold to Christianity, or any form of objective truth, there must be disagreements, for we make the bold claim that our way is The Way.

During the 2020 “Great Awakening,” when I became deconverted from the social justice movement, I had many conversations with friends who insisted that I simply must not understand their positions or the lived experiences of minorities. No matter how well-versed in Foucault or Said or Derrida I was, my perspective was dismissed as ignorant and uncaring, rather than simply rejecting a worldview of which I had a deep understanding.

Likewise, when Elder Holland addressed BYU in what has now been dubbed the “[musket fire speech](#),” he expressed deep caring and concern for LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints, and noted the effort which the Brethren have dedicated to understanding and ministering to this population:

Too often, the world has been unkind, in many instances, crushingly cruel, to these our brothers and sisters. Like many of you, we have spent hours with them, and wept and prayed and wept again in an effort to offer love and hope while keeping the gospel strong and the obedience to commandments evident in every individual life.

And yet this claim was ignored, and he was willfully misconstrued as having called for “musket fire” toward LGBT+ students.

While I find it truly saddening that individuals interpreted that talk as a call to attack, I also find it genuinely concerning that a call to defend the gospel was met with so much hostility. In the same way, Halverson’s genuine expression of admiration for women and concern about what a catastrophic loss it is anytime a woman leaves the Church was so twisted into a paternalistic caricature, it is almost hard for me to take his critics’ arguments seriously.

Having received strong pushback in the past for some of my public writing about controversial topics, I do understand how emotionally challenging it can be to face a storm of social media criticism. I relate to the instinct of apologizing when someone expresses hurt to salvage relationships, rather than worrying so much about who was really right in the disagreement.

But when faithful Latter-day Saint influencers concede ground to critics, it makes it harder for women of faith to express faithfulness. It grants authority to agitators to set the boundaries of what is acceptable to discuss in matters of faith. It tells faithful Latter-day Saint women that, yes, the critics are right, when you say that you are happy in your role as a woman, that you aren’t interested in priesthood ordination, *you are hurting other women.*

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My friend Meagan has [written](#) powerfully about the eye-opening experience it was for her when she joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at 15 years old, and saw the way the Church molds boys and men “to care for women and about women.”

This was in stark contrast to many of the men she was exposed to in her traumatic early childhood. Latter-day Saint men, through service in the Church, become thoughtful, generous, gentle, and selfless leaders. But the women of the Church also need men who are bold and courageous, who defend faithful women and their viewpoints against the kind of emotional terrorism that is so common in online discourse. In the case of Halverson's video, hundreds of women poured into the comments with words of support. Their perspectives are also important.

So are men listening to women in the Church? I asked some faithful sisters I know about their experiences feeling heard by men in the Church.

One sister shared that she had recently had to request a release from a leadership calling in her ward because of a change in family circumstances. Her bishop asked thoughtful questions about what was going on in her life and not only honored the request, but made an extra effort to look after her family during their challenging time.

Another pointed to the many additional garment materials and styles that have been introduced in the past 15 years, which allow for more comfort and flexibility in clothing.

One friend recently participated in a focus group facilitated by the Church for a new women's podcast pilot. She met virtually with women of diverse backgrounds and life circumstances to give feedback about the direction of the podcast and to share more broadly about what they would like to see more of in church media.

For myself, I recall a Face-to-Face in 2018 with Elder Quentin L. Cook and the late historian Kate Holbrook, where Elder Cook deferred to Dr. Holbrook to teach and testify about church history, including tough topics like polygamy. I also think of my own family and the families of many of my friends—women are valued decision makers in Latter-day Saint homes, with the important stewardship of not only caretaking and nurturing but also secular and gospel education.

Women of the Church who disagree with various church policies and doctrines are beloved daughters of God. They are worthy of all of God's love and have valuable contributions to make in the kingdom of God. I believe the

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brethren should listen to these women and take their concerns seriously (and I believe the brethren do).

But as a general membership, we must choose which voices we listen to. We cannot hear and validate all perspectives; we cannot agree with everyone; we cannot caveat every testimony. What women am I choosing to listen to on matters of faith? I am choosing to listen to the women who teach and testify of the Savior and His gospel.

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I do not believe it was a coincidence that the parable of the ten virgins was cited at least five times during this last general conference. Our leaders are trying to help us refine our focus toward the Savior and prepare for His second coming. To that end, while we should all embrace our friends of all faiths—including our more heterodox or progressive Latter-day Saint friends—there is also wisdom in filtering our own social media so that it supports our faith in Christ, or at the very least is not actively working against faith. We need to turn off and tune out the voices that do not help us hear Him.

President Camille Johnson of the General Relief Society recently gave wise counsel applicable both to influencers and podcasters and general church membership: “We are commanded to share His light. So, keep your lamp full of the oil of conversion to Jesus Christ and be prepared to keep your lamp trimmed and burning bright. Then let that light shine. When we share our light, we bring the relief of Jesus Christ to others, our conversion to Him is deepened, and we can be whole even while we wait for healing. And as we let our light shine brightly, we can be joyful even while we wait.”

About the author

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