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And ye shall know that it is by me that ye are led (1 Nephi 17:13).

I Am Known

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As soon as I hung up the phone, I knew I was going back to Utah. I was not sure why, but I would accept the invitation to teach one semester at BYU as a visiting faculty member. Since I had an undergraduate degree from the University of Utah and had been in Washington, D.C., for over a decade—living, working, and completing graduate degrees—I wondered how the chair of BYU’s organizational behavior department had even noticed me. I doubted that anyone at BYU had discovered my doctoral work. I was completing what is called a nontraditional program. Moreover, my program had focused on a potentially controversial subject for any academic community, including BYU: organizational changes that confront institutionalized forms of discrimination. That is to say, my background was in how organizations could identify and eliminate discrimination from the workplace.

I had arrived in Washington, D.C., as a young, naive, optimistic “girl” from Utah. Most of the time I actually lived in the city itself, determined not to live as a commuter from Virginia or Maryland. But my most distinctive identity was being a Latter-day Saint, often the only one in my work group, graduate classes, or apartment building. However, each Sunday I was one of the many single members of the Washington Ward, on 16th Street, N.W. I developed a range of coping responses for those two very different situations: being viewed negatively in my professional interactions because I was a Mormon and being seen as too different a Mormon by many Mormons because of my professional interests. Sometimes among non-Latter-day Saints I avoided the subject of race and religion; sometimes among Church members I avoided conversations about discrimination, although occasionally I did try to integrate statements about racism into Church lesson discussions. In addition, I learned how to defend a Church position on black men and the priesthood even though I worked as an antiracist trainer. But going to BYU, I thought, would allow me to integrate my professional and Church identities. I saw the invitation from BYU as an opportunity to experience the combination of being employed at a Mormon institution and being a Latter-day Saint at the same time and in the same community. Surely, it would be a journey toward Zion.

In fact, I had felt summoned by the Lord to return to Utah and believed that there was something I was to contribute. So I was not really surprised when I was encouraged to apply for a full-time faculty position after my visiting faculty appointment expired. As a nontraditional academic, one who concentrated on applying knowledge to practical issues in organizations, I did not expect to be valued for research skills or even for work experience. Further, I did not think that I was being called to BYU as a career move; it was more than that. There was no doubt in my mind that I could contribute to the college program and curriculum as a practitioner, a nontraditional researcher, and a skilled teacher. Moreover, I fully expected to be accepted as a Mormon among Mormons in a Mormon work environment. Being LDS would no longer be my most distinct identity either in the workplace or the shopping mall.

From my first semester, I underestimated how much colleagues would shape my experience at BYU when they consistently defined me as a different Mormon. Wanted: older, single, female, seeking professional colleagues. Regrettably, for some colleagues these aspects of my identity seemed to be sufficient for defining what kind of Mormon I *really* was. No direct contact with me was required. In my school days and in my profession I had studied how individuals with a common identity in a workplace can treat others who are, or are perceived to be, different or outside of their group. Now it was my turn to be perceived as different.

For me, the discussions of real or perceived treatment were familiar. They had arisen in uncounted interviews, personal observations, and informal conversations. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, few of us who worked with differences among employees believed that working in the same organization offered employees a strong enough motivation for them to examine their behavior toward fellow workers. It was a challenge to ask employees to eliminate prejudice and stereotypes and to reexamine their own perceptions of “the other.”

But I had been raised as a daughter of God. For me, the salutation of “sister” or “brother” was an acknowledgment of a shared bond with all other Church members. The commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves was a constant reminder that we were all in this together. Moreover, it was a togetherness based on eternal principles. In this light, I had anticipated working in an environment where those shared principles would guide daily interactions with colleagues and students and would shape our aspirations toward progress both as employees and as a people. I was surprised.

Gradually the realization dawned on me that many of my colleagues perceived me as truly different. I am still sorting through my perceptions about the behavior of others toward me (of course, I know that one cannot be fully certain about the motivation of others). The sorting process has been further complicated because even though BYU required me to teach, research, and be a good citizen, for me the university also offered a unique “field site.” Here I could study and apply my research findings about the dynamics of difference and organizational change.

My journey of being one among many and yet being different can be summarized in three stages. I arrived at BYU believing that I knew what God would have me do. In time, I became discouraged among those with whom I thought I would find most similarity. I then went through a period of asking whether my experience mattered to God, which he answered in the affirmative. Now I know I am found, affirmed, and refined. In the initial stage, I assumed that similarities would form the strongest bond between my colleagues and me since they rested on a shared gospel foundation that shaped how we approached both service and professional competency. My differences in experience and preparation as a single woman with a nontraditional degree, I thought, would be seen as a unique resource. I assumed that I had arrived “whole” in Zion—that who I was would be a valued part of what I could contribute as a sister and a professional colleague.

I arrived feeling that I was on an errand for the Lord. As a result, a number of comments and actions really did not bother me. For example, one faculty member told me that my degree must have come from a “mail-order” program; I heard others say that I was hired only because I was a woman; my leaders assigned me to serve on multiple committees—department, college, and university. These elements were above and beyond the normal difficulties that a new faculty member faces of preparing for classes that one has never taught. Further, as a nontraditional academic, I did not notice what I did not have: conference money, research assistants, and a network of professional colleagues who knew my work and would promote my work among other colleagues. I simply wanted to be competent as a faculty member; I failed to see the enormity of having a different academic preparation for a very traditional profession and organization. Instead, I focused on my intention to serve an organization that now housed both my work and spiritual communities.

I came fortified. And in the early years, I was nourished by some key relationships with male colleagues in the former organizational behavior department that other women on campus told me were better than in their departments. I had assumed that as an LDS people, we were to constantly seek both personal and organizational development. Therefore, I thought that my skills could help. I did not focus on being accepted or rewarded; my primary criterion was, “Is my contribution useful?”

Of course, my goals were not unique. My associates also viewed service as a common feature of working at BYU. I had thus anticipated that I would work with others on projects of service within both the university and the LDS community. In addition, I believed that we could find ways of valuing and integrating the different others at the university: women, people of color, nontraditional students, and so on. It was with this view in mind that I accepted invitations to serve on and chair numerous university committees, seeing them as vehicles for change. But the behaviors that I encountered seemed to say: It’s not that we don’t know how to change; we don’t see the necessity for change that you do.

Because of my background, I had assumed that I would contribute to the university’s ability to change. But what if the real issue was that leaders did not see a need to change and/or individuals did not desire change? What if I was not being useful but being used?

My personal optimism and my desire to be a helpful part of my department and university sustained me for a long time. I went through the tenure process. Because tenure and advancement in rank are distinct parts of professional progress, it was years later that I applied for and was denied rank advancement, creating a personal challenge for me. To be sure, because of my unique focus and preparation, I had not come to BYU expecting to be supported or rewarded for

my research. But the sequence of activities that determine rank advancement offered an opportunity for me to reflect on who I was at the university.

I cannot describe an exact beginning and end to this second stage of my BYU experience. But the experience is as tangible as my first employment experience at a raspberry farm on the Utah-Idaho border. In my teenage years, I spent midsummer weeks picking raspberries, from earliest daylight until the heat of the morning began to melt the ripest berries at our touch, about 9 A.M. Our berry-picker tasks were simple: we were to fill the small cartons (to make up a case), to glean the row, not to bypass ripened berries nor pick unripe berries, to move quickly enough to fill a good number of cases, and, therefore, to be seen as able to pick the next day. I was too trusting.

If I looked at the overall berry field from a distance, it seemed that all pickers had a similar task. Our collective job was to pick the berries in the field. But at the individual level, experiences differed: some individuals stuffed unripe berries in the bottom of a carton, some accused the person on the other side of the row of stealing the best berries through the bush, others left berries hanging because of their haste to finish a bad row and to be assigned a better row, and some diligently completed the basic berry-picker tasks. Some of the more experienced and better pickers told me to “just watch me and you will do okay, since one has to learn by doing.” Once in a while I even became aware that someone knew of my efforts. There was an older picker who occasionally would offer to top off my carton with her remaining berries if we both arrived at the main berry stand at the end of the shift.

I still vividly remember a morning that I stopped picking in my row and stood and looked around. I had assumed that through our common experience, I was connected, very connected, to the other pickers. But I was surprised to realize that my perceived connections did not really affect the behavior of the other workers toward me. For example, as we worked there was no indication that the others knew or cared about what I was experiencing, unless my work drew the attention of “Old Man Carson” and he came to check the row. If that happened, their work might also be checked. I am sure that the individual pickers’ thoughts of caring both about me and about their jobs varied greatly. But the outcome of their common behavior on the job was quite similar. They wanted to stay out of the boss’s way. That outcome led to my perception that I did not matter to the accomplishment of their tasks, unless I was a liability.

One day at BYU, I stopped in my “row” and stood to look around. I knew the requirements of my row. The requirements involved research, good teaching, and citizenship. I had heard from colleagues at other universities about the politics as well as the practicality of pretenure, tenure, and rank advancement. And, of course, I cared about meeting the requirements that would shape my professional standing. But I also had believed that my most important contribution would be through working with colleagues (row by row) to improve the whole. While one’s professional status and preparation can create different individual experiences, my focus was on a hoped-for common goal: at the end of the row was a better department, college, or university. I believed that my contribution to that goal would shape my soul.

But did my contribution make a difference? Was I correct that we were all simultaneously working not only on our own goals but also working together toward the larger common goals? As I “stood in my row,” I felt overwhelmed by the effect of my differences on my experience at BYU. Was I a liability?

The key individuals who had assisted me and whom I had seen in the other rows of my early years were gone. During a week, month, or semester no one stopped by my office to talk over ideas; I was no longer in a campus-based church calling, which had provided connections to some colleagues outside my discipline; my college associates did not invite me to lunch, dinner, or a home evening. Was I alone?

When I stood in my row, I realized that I did not have social ties on campus through my professional activities. My research had been reported mostly in proprietary studies sponsored by this or that organization, though some had appeared in journals or were unpublished. Given my interests and the stage of my publications at the time, there was no apparent interest among colleagues at BYU to coauthor works with me. And there was no one outside BYU, in part because I was at BYU. What was I doing at BYU?

I tried to discern what support should or could be available from my associates at the university. I watched to see what came back to me as a member of the BYU community. If it did not matter to others what I did, as long as I did not create a problem, did it matter to God? If I was on an errand of the Lord, then had he forgotten me? Or had I been distracted by seemingly more pressing matters?

I was mildly surprised to realize that I had come to see myself as a liability. When I had arrived on campus, I felt sustained both from my belief that my choice to be at BYU had divine support and by my own studies about differences within organizations. But I had also wanted the experience of being valued in a Latter-day Saint community. For the most part, it appeared that I had failed.

While trying not to judge the intentions of colleagues, I sensed that my experience was being shaped by their day-to-day responses to my differences. For instance, I was not invited to coauthor, as I have noted; I heard that

resources would not be allocated to me for research assistance or for travel to conferences since I wasn't "a scholar." Even though I had good evaluations as an administrator, I perceived that there was a ceiling on administrative roles for women. And, although I was a good teacher, women teachers were not referred to as role models. Moreover, from discussions with male and female colleagues about how to enrich teaching, I learned that women's stories, leadership metaphors, or church experiences were not seen as universal teaching tools, for either male or female students in a business school.

While my research suggested, and my theology demanded, that I not judge another's intent, the combination of certain behaviors of individual colleagues created an impact on me that was greater than any single act toward me, positive or negative. And this contributed to my not seeing the few whose behavior really was different—those who cared about me as a colleague and a sister. I felt invisible to the Lord, isolated among my own people.

Instead of my differences being a means of my contributing to BYU, those differences became my major focus as I internalized feelings about the behavior of some toward me. I became immobilized. In my heart, I did not feel that I had arrived at BYU with a what-is-in-it-for-me attitude that sometimes comes from personal or professional competition. But now I began to focus on the question, "What is happening to me?" The intensity of my experience of being different began to accumulate. This intensity was amplified by my inferences about the behavior of colleagues toward me and the seeming lack of interest in or trust of me, even though I was a sister. All combined in me to produce an uncomfortable preoccupation with my own experience.

Was I being too sensitive? Was I the problem? I tried to understand how the combination of behaviors—common patterns in responses, failure to include me, and so on—accumulated to shape my perceptions and experiences. When I voiced my concerns, it was usually in a conversation with one person and not, obviously, with all the people whose behavior affected me. Since the individual to whom I would confide, let's call him Frank, had not been present when the other incidents occurred that shaped my feelings, he could not see how others had interacted with me. So he would focus only on his behavior or on mine. "But, do *I* do that?" was his usual question. Frank would then compare his own experiences with mine and see more similarities than differences. In his judgment, the intensity of my feelings was greater than any individual behavior warranted. He concluded that my perceptions must be the primary factor in what I was experiencing. But I was experiencing behaviors based on difference, more than I was being embraced because of similar beliefs. Responding to one who is different in a community where shared values are also operating is a challenge for many. Their focus usually falls on the few who are different.

Stage three of my BYU experience began with the almost simultaneous occurrence of two events. One is too sacred to write about in full detail, and the other forms a secular yet well-constructed parable from God as a lesson in how much I had internalized my "liability" status in Zion.

The sacred place. Over and over I have been instructed to take my problems to the Lord and to prepare for temple attendance with a concern or desire in mind. After being immobilized by internalizing my liability status, I went to the temple seeking peace, needing a few moments in an incubator of holiness away from a hassled world. I had no self-selected topics in mind. As the session began, I heard a voice so clearly that I turned to see who was behind me. The short message, so attuned to who I was and what I was experiencing, gently but clearly affirmed my worth. From the words, I knew that God knew where I was and who I was. I was stunned, and humbled.

The story of two travelers. Delta Airlines maintains a special customer service line for frequent flyers. Since work assignments have required me to travel since I was twenty, I have flown more than a million miles. The payoff for risking life and limb at multiple take offs and landings comes to me in the form of travel benefits and attention to me as a special customer.

I stood negotiating an upgrade for a flight. The friendly agent knew who I was and had talked with me before. Our light banter and laughter covered a number of topics as we waited for the ticket to be printed. I then looked to my right and saw a faculty colleague being waited on by another agent. My colleague looked at me, looked away, and continued his conversation with his agent. This was a colleague who had never initiated a conversation with me, had never spoken or smiled at me in hallways or elevators in over a decade at BYU. My immediate thought was, "Oh no, my agent doesn't realize that I am not as important. He doesn't know that I am not supposed to be getting all this positive attention." For a moment, I felt embarrassed and actually glanced at the agent waiting on me to see if he had noticed. The behavior of the agent assisting me had not changed. And did not change. I was still an important customer.

It took longer than the trip to unravel the implications of my first response to my colleague. It had not come from thoughtful analysis but was instead a learned reaction. I was not usually in a secular situation with a colleague from my own college. Non-BYU professional colleagues with whom I have worked, consulted, or researched have valued me. In me, they saw similarities in values and differences in experiences as resources. Over time, as business and political climates have changed, organizations have wanted more of my assistance in valuing and managing employee

differences. In a flash, this circumstance and the airline agent's attentiveness led me to a freeing realization.

When I saw myself in a situation that illustrated my value to others, as my experience with the agent demonstrated, I realized that the behavior of the BYU colleague, whose pattern of behavior over the years gave no indication that I was valued as a sister, colleague, or administrator, was not the norm. Instead, it was his behavior that was different. Not greeting me at the airport did not affect my experience in that setting at all (on campus, of course, his behavior had become one more ingredient in my experience of subordination). I started to laugh, which did get me more attention from the agent helping me, but I was at a loss to explain it to him.

As if someone had rotated the kaleidoscope, the same pieces of my experience now created a new image. I sensed that I mattered—not because of an organizational contribution I could make, or because I am similar to or different from others, but because I am. And even though I am among his people, as a people we have not been perfected. My faith must encompass not only the circumstances of my own existence, but also the crucible of the existence of many others. Fundamentally, it is in our own self-interest to understand the experience of others. Being at BYU has provided me a wonderful opportunity to be one with others who share my beliefs, to be viewed as different from the many, to see others as different from me, and to struggle with the common goal of creating Zion. Moreover, I have come to know that I am known by God who cares for each one of us, just as he does for our progress as a people.