



Lighten Up

Chieko N. Okazaki

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Lighten Up! brings Sister Okazaki's fresh perspective and sparkling personality from the podium to the page. Each chapter is filled with insights. Sister Okazaki's straightforward, practical, and cheerful view of life has brought strength to people all over the world. A leader with both feet firmly on the ground and a twinkle in her eye, she believes without equivocation that the gospel is good news.

Lighten Up Details

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From Reader Review Lighten Up for online ebook

Carol says

Sister Okazaki was my 1st grade teacher and a good friend of my parents. But I didn't appreciate her then as much as I do now. I love her straight-forward approach to life. All of her advise makes very good sense to me.

Erin says

Okazaki is just the kind of Mormon I aspire to be - rock solid in her testimony of the atonement, embracing diverse life experiences, forgiving, service-oriented, a thoughtful reader of the scriptures, wise, and hopeful. It is always a treat to learn from her words.

Jenn says

This book was definitely not what I was expecting. It was surprising and quite like a breath of fresh air. Other than scripture, I don't read many religious books as they tend to put me to sleep. This book, while it's basically just a collection of speeches, is easy to read and not at all stuffy.

I had never even heard of Chieko Okazaki, but now I want to go find every talk she's ever given and read it! She is an incredible woman with an incredible life story and a unique perspective. (She was the first non-Caucasian woman to serve as General Relief Society president.)

I felt like the overall message of the book (besides "lighten up") is to love yourself.

Other key points:

- We are all different. That's ok. Actually, it's good.
- Accept your imperfections.
- There's usually not just one right way. Find what works for you and do things your own way.
- Christ is so willing to forgive.
- Don't judge others.

I was surprised to see her quote the NIV of the Bible. I don't think I've ever seen another prominent LDS leader do that. Besides the NIV passages often being easier to understand than the KJV, I liked the message she sent by including them: you don't always have to do things "the Mormon way." Mormons never use the NIV, but is there goodness to be found there? Sure! There's not just one right way to learn.

Eve says

I like her upbeat and decisive attitude--she had some great ideas on decision making and priorities, but her outlook on raising children and her family dynamic with her husband, while valid, was somewhat different

than my situation, hence not helpful: she raised two boys while working full-time as a teacher/in the education field and her husband shared responsibilities at home equally. Ha! Not my experience!

I did like her perspective coming from non-LDS families and balancing staying true to her faith and finding ways to be true to her family and their traditional Japanese culture and family culture. She is an amazing person, being so true to herself, receiving an education and being a leader, especially in the era where that was discouraged for women, as well as within her culture, which expected a woman to not become educated and be subservient to her spouse and her spouse's family.

I absolutely loved how she talks frankly about the atonement and releasing guilt, not in a sanctimonious way, but a very easy-to-understand way, a simple way, without being simplistic. I also love how she talks about not condemning others or ourselves and her open attitude is so catching, it makes me feel inspired to be more like this myself.

Still reading--this is one of those books you pick up, read a few pages, think about it, and save more for another time. Really a lot to think about. It's love, acceptance, reality meets the ideal, a wake up call in a wonderfully warm way.

Jenava says

I liked this book because, even though she is devout LDS, she doesn't focus on being a good Mormon at all. It is ALL about being a good Christian and a good human being. I found this a breath of fresh air after so many nauseating church books:)!!!!!!

Christi says

I loved reading a book by this believing, female Mormon author who served in the General Relief Society Presidency--but who was not the type of GA we're used to hearing from. Okazaki is of Japanese-American heritage, a working mom, and a convert. I found her insights on balance and diversity so, so refreshing, and her positive outlook (when there were many things in her life that could have potentially been crushing) not only an example, but actually sincere. What a woman she was.

Erin says

It is interesting that this book is a compilation of various talks, devotionals, and firesides of Sister Okazaki. She is a good speaker and very motivational. I love it when someone tells me I am doing better than I think I am, but that I can do better. Has anyone heard that before? I guess I am getting too old. I have heard the same things over and over again. I guess it is good that after the 5th time I finally get it. If you belong to the Church of Jesus Christ of LDS, then I think it is great to read a book like this every now and then. It is not the good "doctrine type" book that I love reading. I did learn several things (or re-learn) reading this.

SherRon says

Probably the best LDS book I've ever read! Chieko has a wonderful way of making you accept who you are and what you are doing right now as ok and yet still inspire you to be better. Here are a few of my favorite quotes from the book.

“Only you know your circumstances, your energy level, the needs of your children, and the emotional demands of your other obligations. Be wise during intensive seasons of your life. Cherish your agency, and don’t give it away casually. Don’t compare yourself to others — nearly always this will make you despondent. Don’t accept somebody else’s interpretation of how you should be spending your time. Make the best decision you can and then evaluate it to see how it works.”

“Be spiritually independent enough that your relationship with the Savior doesn’t depend on your circumstances or what other people say and do. Have the spiritual independence to be a Mormon – the best Mormon you can – in your own way. Not the bishop’s way. Not the Relief Society president’s way. Your way”.

"We talk in great generalities about the sins of all humankind, about the suffering of the entire human family. But we don't experience pain in generalities. We experience it individually.

That means he knows what it felt like when your mother died of cancer- how it was for your mother, how it still is for you. He knows what it felt like to lose the student body election. He knows that moment when the brakes locked and the car started to skid. He experienced the slave ship sailing from Ghana toward Virginia. He experienced the gas chambers at Dachau. He experienced napalm in Vietnam. He knows about drug addiction and alcoholism.

Let me go further. There is nothing you have experienced as a woman that he does not know and recognize.

On a profound level, he understands the hunger to hold your baby that sustains you through pregnancy.

He understands both the physical pain of giving birth and the immense joy. He knows about PMS and cramps and menopause. He understands about rape and infertility and abortion.

He understands your mother-pain when your five-year-old leaves for kindergarten, when a bully picks on your fifth-grader, when your daughter calls to say that the new baby has Down’s Syndrome. He knows your mother-rage when a trusted babysitter sexually abuses your two-year-old, when someone gives your thirteen-year-old drugs, when someone seduces your seventeen-year-old. He knows the pain you live with when you come home to a quiet apartment where the only visitors are children, when you hear that your former husband and his new wife were sealed in the temple last week, when your fiftieth wedding anniversary rolls around and your husband has been dead for two years.

He knows all that.

He's been there.

He's been lower than all that.

He's not waiting for us to be perfect. Perfect people don't need a Savior. He came to save his people in their

imperfections. He is the Lord of the living, and the living make mistakes. He's not embarrassed by us, angry at us, or shocked. He wants us in our brokenness, in our unhappiness, in our guilt and our grief."

Michael says

I don't have enough praise for Okazaki. As I mentioned in a comment while I was reading, her words are a balm for wounds and weariness. It spoke to me in very personal ways about every dozen pages, reorienting some long-standing narratives in my head through healing.

Sheri says

What a wonderful book! Normally, I'm not a big reader of spiritual or self-help books. I shamefully tend to lean toward the shallow, easy to understand fiction. I've been trying hard to change this. So when a friend of mine suggested this book after I was berating myself for being a bad mom, I decided to throw caution to the wind and give it shot. While I will admit that it didn't exactly keep me captivated the whole time (which should be obvious since I've been reading this book for months on end), it really had some wonderful lessons.

I came away from this book with a wonderful appreciation for the amazing author who knew just what I - and every other woman who thinks she needs to be perfect - need to hear. It's OK that I lose my temper with my kids. It's OK that I asked to be released from a calling that brought me to tears every week last year. It's OK that I don't say my prayers every single night and that I've never canned my own peaches, or that I don't even know where to start when it comes to genealogy. No one is perfect, and the only person who expects you to be is usually yourself. It's rare that I read a self-help book (religious or not) that I finish thinking, "You know, I don't need to fix everything. As long as I keep doing my best, I'm perfectly ok with who I am." I really, truly loved the message. The section that I loved most and that really brought this message home for me was *Embracing Charity*.

While this book does have its slow points and feels a bit long sometimes, it is most definitely worth a read and I would highly recommend it to those who feel like they just need to lose a few burdens and...well...Lighten Up!

Summer Meyers says

I love reading inspirational Mormon books like these. So often we see short little essay books, that can be rather redundant. Those are special in their own way, but I like something a little more thorough--a discussion rather than just a Sunday talk expanded.

Like a lot of LDS women, I feel guilt. Lighten Up! is a cheerful reminder that it's okay. There are times and seasons in our life where we will excel in some things and others may fall to the wayside. Does this mean we have failed? Not at all! This is where the beautiful gospel doctrine of grace comes into play. We do not need to be perfect by tomorrow. We need to only do our best.

This could have easily swung into, "You needn't try so hard." But it didn't. It was encouraging and reminding

us to forgive ourselves. Guilt should not rule our lives. The Gospel message is one of joy and happiness---not another burden to carry.

I could have marked this thing to pieces. As it is, I liked a few quotes and have added this one story that she told. I would have added it to the quotes section, but it was rather long.

When Ed and I were serving our mission in Japan, Elder and Sister Bruce R McConkie came to tour the mission. One of the places within our mission boundaries that they wanted to see was the Noritake china factory, so we visited it with them. We had a wonderful tour and saw many beautiful things, but the most impressive thing to me was the reject barrels. At every stage of the process standing next to the conveyor belts that carried the dishes along, were large barrels. When the dishes were formed out of the clay, someone looked at each cup, each saucer, each plate. If there was a flaw in it, crash! It went flying into the barrel. After it had been fired in the kiln, there would be another inspection. Again if there was a flaw, crash! Then the glaze was applied and inspected. Crash! Crash! And then the pattern was painted on. There was another inspection. There were more crashes.

At that point, I became worried. There seemed to be so much waste. Did the inspectors really need to be this rigorous? I mentioned these barrels to our guide. He laughed and said, "You mustn't worry. Nothing is ever wasted. All of the items in the barrels are taken back to the beginning, reground, reshaped, and started on their journey again. But it must be perfect to be Noritake."

This experience was illuminating to me as I thought about the need we have to achieve perfection. There is no waste. And there is no haste. We will all have all the time we need. We have a loving Father who makes sure we will receive the experiences we need to achieve perfection. He will let us start over again as often as we need to.

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Oh and this made me laugh. I don't think I've seen this before!

Barbara Smith: Ideals are stars to steer by. They are not a stick to beat ourselves with.

Kelly says

I feel like Chieko Okazaki was really ahead of her time in her way of thinking and so in her life during the 1950s-70s and at the time of publication (1993) a lot of her ideas probably seemed more enlightening and new than they did to me reading it today. I still enjoyed the book though, she has a spunky personality and a lot of great things to say; her perspective just didn't seem as novel and different as I was expecting it to be based on the good things I had heard about the book.

Erika B. (SOS BOOKS) says

I loved this book! I sincerely believe that Chieko Okazaki is probably the coolest and most tuned into women woman that I've ever read. She exhorts women to let the Savior carry their burdens or even just let other women help you on your journey because we all need each other to "lighten up". Fabulous!

"Let's stop competing with other women and stop criticizing them, too. Let's stop competing with ourselves and stop picking at ourselves. Let's relax and enjoy who we are. Who we are is enough. We need to love

ourselves. Remember that in a gospel sense love means an unconditional desire for the eternal well-being of a soul. Do we feel that we're worthy of such an unconditional regard? Not just someday. Not just if we do everything on the list. But right now? I love myself. I know I'm imperfect, but I also know that I don't have to judge myself harshly. The Lord is my helper. I can go to him. He loves me and wants an eternity of good things for me. But he also wants to give me seconds, and minutes, and hours of good things right now. This is true for you, too. He's not waiting for us to become perfect before we can be happy. We can take our time. We can enjoy ourselves. We can consult our own needs and wants. We can forgive ourselves for what we can't do, and we can be patient about the things we can't do yet. We can lighten up and stop punishing ourselves by thinking we have to do it all. Who we are is all right. God loves us now! And what we're doing is an acceptable gift to Him."

"Someday we will all know who we are, because the Savior, who truly knows us, will look at us and we will see ourselves through His eyes-pure, eternal, and all-knowing-rather than through our own mortal, shortsighted, dim perspective. And when we see ourselves as He sees us, we will recognize our glory. Trust in the Lord's love for you. I do. He is my rock and my salvation, my wings, and my roots."

I have learned this secret, so that anywhere, at any time, I am content, whether I am full or hungry, whether I have too much or too little. I have the strength to face all conditions by the power that Christ gives me.

-Phillipians 4:11-13 Good News Version

Anneli Hardy says

She is amazing!

Beth says

A refreshing and different (yet doctrinal!) book. As someone who holds themselves to high standards and tends to see things as black-and-white, Sister Okazaki had plenty to teach me! I think we all need to "lighten up" -- to turn to the Savior, the light of the world, and drop our heavy burdens and be yoked with Him whose burden is light.

"That's all the Lord wants of you -- you, yourself. And that's all you can give. You can't be someone you aren't. You can't give someone else's gift. Who and what you are is enough, and each gift, given like this, is glorious!" (p. 69)

"The Doctrine and Covenants explains, 'The Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind.' (D&C 64:34). It doesn't say that the Lord requires competence, or a PhD, or immaculate housekeeping, or professional success. But it doesn't say that he'll be satisfied with a half-hearted you, either." (p. 69)

"Light doesn't compete with darkness. Suppose you're in a dark room and you want to get rid of darkness. You can't catch the darkness and put it in a box. You can't sweep it out the door. You can't find a hole that the darkness is coming in through and nail a board over it ... The more you grapple with the dark, the further away you are from getting rid of it. Only light dispels darkness. Darkness and light can't occupy the same space ... If there's darkness in your life, don't grapple with it, don't dwell on it, don't stay involved in it. Get to the light switch!" (pp. 200-201)

