

Daughters of God

ELDER M. RUSSELL BALLARD

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

There is no role in life more essential and more eternal than that of motherhood.



Brothers and sisters, recently my wife, Barbara, had back surgery and could not lift, twist, or bend. Consequently, I have done more lifting, twisting, and bending than ever before—and it has made me more appreciative of what women, and especially you mothers, do every day in our homes.

While women live in homes under many different circumstances—married, single, widowed, or divorced, some with children and some without—all are beloved of God, and He has a plan for His righteous daughters to receive the highest blessings of eternity.

This afternoon I want to focus my remarks primarily on mothers, particularly on young mothers.

As a young father, I learned the demanding role of motherhood. I

served as a counselor and then as bishop for a period of 10 years. During that time we were blessed with six of our seven children. Barbara was often worn-out by the time I got home Sunday evening. She tried to explain what it was like to sit on the back row in sacrament meeting with our young family. Then the day came that I was released. After sitting on the stand for 10 years, I was now sitting with my family on the back row.

The ward's singing mothers' chorus was providing the music, and I found myself sitting alone with our six children. I have never been so busy in my whole life. I had the hand puppets going on both hands, and that wasn't working too well. The Cheerios got away from me, and that was embarrassing. The coloring books didn't seem to entertain as well as they should.

As I struggled with the children through the meeting, I looked up at Barbara, and she was watching me and smiling. I learned for myself to more fully appreciate what all of you dear mothers do so well and so faithfully!

A generation later, as a grandfather, I have watched the sacrifices my daughters have made in rearing their children. And now, still another generation later, I am watching with awe the pressures on my granddaughters as they guide their children in this busy and demanding world.

After observing and empathizing

with three generations of mothers and thinking of my own dear mother, I surely know that there is no role in life more essential and more eternal than that of motherhood.

There is *no* one perfect way to be a good mother. Each situation is unique. Each mother has different challenges, different skills and abilities, and certainly different children. The choice is different and unique for each mother and each family. Many are able to be “full-time moms,” at least during the most formative years of their children's lives, and many others would like to be. Some may have to work part- or full-time; some may work at home; some may divide their lives into periods of home and family and work. What matters is that a mother loves her children deeply and, in keeping with the devotion she has for God and her husband, prioritizes them above all else.

I am impressed by countless mothers who have learned how important it is to focus on the things that can only be done in a particular season of life. If a child lives with parents for 18 or 19 years, that span is only one-fourth of a parent's life. And the most formative time of all, the early years in a child's life, represents less than one-tenth of a parent's normal life. It is crucial to focus on our children for the short time we have them with us and to seek, with the help of the Lord, to teach them all we can before they leave our homes. This eternally important work falls to mothers and fathers as equal partners. I am grateful that today many fathers are more involved in the lives of their children. But I believe that the instincts and the intense nurturing involvement of mothers with their children will always be a major key to their well-being. In the words of the proclamation on the family, “Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the

World," *Liabona*, Oct. 2004, 49; *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102).

We need to remember that the full commitment of motherhood and of putting children first can be difficult. Through my own four-generation experience in our family, and through discussions with mothers of young children throughout the Church, I know something of a mother's emotions that accompany her commitment to be at home with young children. There are moments of great joy and incredible fulfillment, but there are also moments of a sense of inadequacy, monotony, and frustration. Mothers may feel they receive little or no appreciation for the choice they have made. Sometimes even husbands seem to have no idea of the demands upon their wives.

As a Church, we have enormous respect and gratitude to you mothers of young children. We want you to be happy and successful in your families and to have the validation and support you need and deserve. So today, let me ask and briefly answer four questions. While my answers may seem extremely simple, if the simple things are being tended to, a mother's life can be most rewarding.

The first question: What can *you* do, as a young mother, to reduce the pressure and enjoy your family more?

First, recognize that the joy of motherhood comes in moments. There will be hard times and frustrating times. But amid the challenges, there are shining moments of joy and satisfaction.

Author Anna Quindlen reminds us not to rush past the fleeting moments. She said: "The biggest mistake I made [as a parent] is the one that most of us make. . . . I did not live in the moment enough. This is particularly clear now that the moment is gone, captured only in photographs. There is one picture of [my three children] sitting in the grass on a quilt in the shadow of the swing set on a summer day, ages



A family in Merthyr Tydfil, Wales, arrives at the stake center for conference.

six, four, and one. And I wish I could remember what we ate, and what we talked about, and how they sounded, and how they looked when they slept that night. I wish I had not been in such a hurry to get on to the next thing: dinner, bath, book, bed. I wish I had treasured the doing a little more and the getting it done a little less" (*Loud and Clear* [2004], 10–11).

Second, don't overschedule

yourselves or your children. We live in a world that is filled with options. If we are not careful, we will find every minute jammed with social events, classes, exercise time, book clubs, scrapbooking, Church callings, music, sports, the Internet, and our favorite TV shows. One mother told me of a time that her children had 29 scheduled commitments every week: music lessons, Scouts, dance, Little

League, day camps, soccer, art, and so forth. She felt like a taxi driver. Finally, she called a family meeting and announced, “Something has to go; we have no time to ourselves and no time for each other.” Families need unstructured time when relationships can deepen and real parenting can take place. Take time to listen, to laugh, and to play together.

Third, even as you try to cut out the extra commitments, sisters, find some time for yourself to cultivate your gifts and interests. Pick one or two things that you would like to learn or do that will enrich your life, and make time for them. Water cannot be drawn from an empty well, and if you are not setting aside a little time for what replenishes you, you will have less and less to give to others, even to your children. Avoid any kind of substance abuse, mistakenly thinking that it will help you accomplish more. And don’t allow yourself to be caught up in the time-wasting, mind-numbing things like television soap operas or surfing the Internet. Turn to the Lord in faith, and you will know what to do and how to do it.

Fourth, pray, study, and teach the gospel. Pray deeply about your children and about your role as a mother. Parents can offer a unique and wonderful kind of prayer because they are praying to the Eternal Parent of us all. There is great power in a prayer that essentially says, “We are stewards over Thy children, Father; please help us to raise them as Thou wouldst want them raised.”

The second question: What more can a husband do to support his wife, the mother of their children?

First, show extra appreciation and give more validation for what your wife does every day. Notice things and say thank you—often. Schedule some evenings together, just the two of you.

Second, have a regular time to talk with your wife about each child’s needs and what you can do to help.



Third, give your wife a “day away” now and then. Just take over the household and give your wife a break from her daily responsibilities. Taking over for a while will greatly enhance your appreciation of what your wife does. You may do a lot of lifting, twisting, and bending!

Fourth, come home from work and take an active role with your family. Don’t put work, friends, or sports ahead of listening to, playing with, and teaching your children.

The third question: What can children, even young children, do? Now, you children, please listen to me because there are some simple things you can do to help your mother.

You can pick up your toys when you are finished playing with them, and when you get a little older, you can make your bed, help with the dishes, and do other chores—without being asked.

You can say thank you more often when you finish a nice meal, when a story is read to you at bedtime, or when clean clothes are put in your drawers.

Most of all, you can put your arms around your mother often and tell her you love her.

The last question: What can the Church do?

There are many things the Church offers to mothers and families, but for my purpose today may I suggest that the bishopric and the ward council members be especially watchful and considerate of the time and resource demands on young mothers and their families. Know them and be wise in what you ask them to do at this time in their lives. Alma’s counsel to his son Helaman applies to us today: “Behold I say unto you, that by small and simple things are great things brought to pass” (Alma 37:6).

I hope all of you dear sisters, married or single, never wonder if you have worth in the sight of the Lord and to the leaders of the Church. We love you. We respect you and appreciate your influence in preserving the family and assisting with the growth and the spiritual vitality of the Church. Let us remember that “the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World”). The scriptures and the teachings of the prophets and apostles help all family members to prepare together now to be together through all eternity. I pray that God will continually bless the women of the Church to find joy and happiness in their sacred roles as daughters of God.

Now, in closing, I want to add my witness of President Monson’s prophetic call. I have known him since he was 22 and I was 21. That’s 58 years. I have watched the hand of the Lord prepare him for this day to preside over the Church as the prophet and President. And I add my testimony, along with all of the other testimonies that have been borne through this conference, of his special calling as President of the Church, and add my testimony, along with all of the others, that Jesus is the Christ and this is His Church. We are doing His work, to which I testify in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen. ■