

TEACHING GOSPEL PRINCIPLES TO CHILDREN

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PART 1

IDEAS FOR APPLICATION

According to your own needs and circumstances, follow one or both of these suggestions.

- Read Doctrine and Covenants 68:25–28. As you read, identify the principles and ordinances the Lord has commanded parents to teach their children. Plan a few things you can do to teach these principles and ordinances to your children or to grandchildren, nieces and nephews, or other children you know.
- As you read the following article, choose to focus on one or two of the suggestions given by Elder Robert D. Hales. As different opportunities arise, focus on other suggestions from the article.

READING ASSIGNMENT

Study the following article. If you are married, read and discuss the article with your spouse.

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES: OUR SACRED DUTY

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The Spirit Strengthens Families

Strengthening families is our sacred duty as parents, children, extended family members, leaders, teachers, and individual members of the Church.

The importance of spiritually strengthening families is taught clearly in the scriptures. Father Adam and Mother Eve taught their sons and daughters the gospel. The sacrifices of Abel were accepted by the Lord, whom he loved. Cain, on the other hand, “loved Satan more than God” and committed serious sins. Adam and Eve “mourned before the Lord, because of Cain and his brethren,” but they never ceased to teach their children the gospel (see Moses 5:12, 18, 20, 27; 6:1, 58).

We must understand that each of our children comes with varying gifts and talents. Some, like Abel, seem to be given gifts of faith at birth. Others struggle with every decision they make. As parents, we should never let the searching and struggling of our children make us waver or lose our faith in the Lord.

Alma the Younger, when “racked with torment . . . [and] harrowed up by the memory of [his] many sins,” remembered hearing his father teach about the coming of “Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world” (Alma 36:17). His father’s words

led to his conversion. In like manner, our teaching and testimony will be remembered by our children.

The 2,000 stripling warriors in the army of Helaman testified that their righteous mothers had powerfully taught gospel principles to them (see Alma 56:47–48).

At a time of great spiritual searching, Enos said, “The words which I had often heard my father speak concerning eternal life . . . sunk deep into my heart” (Enos 1:3).

In the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord says that parents are to teach their children “to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, when eight years old. . . .

“And they shall also teach their children to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord” (D&C 68:25, 28).

Teaching the Gospel Strengthens Families

As we teach our children the gospel through word and example, our families are spiritually strengthened and fortified.

The words of living prophets are clear regarding our sacred duty to strengthen our families spiritually. In 1995 the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles issued a proclamation to the world, declaring that “the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children. . . . Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility

to love and care for each other and for their children. . . . Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, to teach them to love and serve one another, [and] to observe the commandments of God" ("The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102).

In February of this year, the First Presidency issued a call to all parents "to devote their best efforts to the teaching and rearing of their children in gospel principles which will keep them close to the Church. The home is the basis of a righteous life, and no other instrumentality can take its place or fulfill its essential functions in carrying forward this God-given responsibility."

In the February letter, the First Presidency taught that by teaching and rearing children in gospel principles, parents can protect their families from corrosive elements. They further counseled parents and children "to give highest priority to family prayer, family home evening, gospel study and instruction, and wholesome family activities. However worthy and appropriate other demands or activities may be, they must not be permitted to displace the divinely-appointed duties that only parents and families can adequately perform" (First Presidency letter, 11 Feb. 1999; cited in *Church News*, 27 Feb. 1999, 3).

With the help of the Lord and His doctrine, all the hurtful effects from challenges a family may meet can be understood and overcome. Whatever the needs of family members may be, we can strengthen our families as we follow the counsel given by prophets.

The key to strengthening our families is having the Spirit of the Lord come into our homes. The goal of our families is to be on the strait and narrow path.

Ideas for Strengthening Families

Countless things can be done within the walls of our homes to strengthen the family. May I share a few ideas that may help identify the areas that need strengthening in our own families. I offer them in a spirit of encouragement, knowing that each family—and each family member—is unique.

Homes Should Be a Safe Place

- Make our homes a safe place where each family member feels love and a sense of belonging. Realize that each child has varying gifts and abilities; each is an individual requiring special love and care.
- Remember, "a soft answer turneth away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1). When my sweetheart and I were sealed in the Salt Lake Temple, Elder Harold B. Lee gave us wise counsel: "When you raise your voice

in anger, the Spirit departs from your home." We must never, out of anger, lock the door of our home or our heart to our children. Like the prodigal son, our children need to know that when they come to themselves they can turn to us for love and counsel.

- Spend individual time with our children, letting them choose the activity and the subject of conversation. Block out distractions.

Teach Children to Pray, Read the Scriptures, and Listen to Worthy Music

- Encourage our children's private religious behavior, such as personal prayer, personal scripture study, and fasting for specific needs. Measure their spiritual growth by observing their demeanor, language, and conduct toward others.
- Pray daily with our children.
- Read the scriptures together. I remember my own mother and father reading the scriptures as we children sat on the floor and listened. Sometimes they would ask, "What does that scripture mean to you?" or "How does it make you feel?" Then they would listen to us as we responded in our own words.
- Read the words of the living prophets and other inspiring articles for children, youth, and adults in Church magazines.
- We can fill our homes with the sound of worthy music as we sing together from the hymnbook and the *Children's Songbook*.

Hold Family Home Evening and Family Councils

- Hold family home evening every week. As parents, we are sometimes too intimidated to teach or testify to our children. I have been guilty of that in my own life. Our children need to have us share spiritual feelings with them and to teach and bear testimony to them.
- Hold family councils to discuss family plans and concerns. Some of the most effective family councils are one-on-one with each family member. Help our children know their ideas are important. Listen to them and learn from them.

Share the Gospel, Support Church Leaders, and Participate as a Family

- Invite missionaries to teach less-active or non-member friends in our homes.
- Show that we sustain and support Church leaders.
- Eat together when possible, and have meaningful mealtime discussions.

- Work together as a family, even if it may be faster and easier to do the job ourselves. Talk with our sons and daughters as we work together. I had that opportunity every Saturday with my father.

Teach Children to Be Good Friends and Prepare for the Future

- Help our children learn how to build good friendships and make their friends feel welcome in our homes. Get to know the parents of the friends of our children.
- Teach our children by example how to budget time and resources. Help them learn self-reliance and the importance of preparing for the future.

Share Heritage and Family Traditions

- Teach our children the history of our ancestors and of our own family history.
- Build family traditions. Plan and carry out meaningful vacations together, considering our children's needs, talents, and abilities. Help them create happy memories, improve their talents, and build their feelings of self-worth.

Teach the Importance of Obeying the Commandments and Receiving Ordinances

- By word and example, teach moral values and a commitment to obeying the commandments.
- After my baptism and confirmation, my mother drew me aside and asked, "What do you feel?" I described as best I could the warm feeling of peace, comfort, and happiness I had. Mother explained that what I was feeling was the gift I had just received, the gift of the Holy Ghost. She told me that if I lived worthy of it, I would have that gift with me continually. That was a teaching moment that has lived with me all my life.

Teach our children the significance of baptism and confirmation, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, partaking of the sacrament, honoring the priesthood, and making and keeping temple covenants. They need to know the importance of living worthy of a temple recommend and preparing for a temple marriage.

- If you have not yet been sealed in the temple to your spouse or children, work as a family to receive temple blessings. Set temple goals as a family.
- Be worthy of the priesthood which you hold, brethren, and use it to bless the lives of your family. . . .

Be Aware of Community, School, and Church Activities

Resources are available outside the home. Wise use of them will strengthen our families.

- Encourage our children to serve in the Church and community.
- Talk to our children's teachers, coaches, counselors, advisers, and Church leaders about our concerns and the needs of our children.
- Know what our children are doing in their spare time. Influence their choice of movies, television programs, and videos. If they are on the Internet, know what they are doing. Help them see the importance of wholesome entertainment.
- Encourage worthwhile school activities. Know what our children are studying. Help them with their homework. Help them realize the importance of education and of preparing for employment and self-sufficiency.
- Young women: Attend Relief Society when you reach your 18th birthday. Some of you may be reluctant to make that transition. You may fear that you won't fit in. My young sisters, this is not the case. There is much in Relief Society for you. It can be a blessing to you throughout your life.
- Young men: Honor the Aaronic Priesthood. It is the preparatory priesthood, preparing you for the Melchizedek Priesthood. Become fully active in the elders quorum when you are ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood. The brotherhood, the quorum instruction, and the opportunities to serve others will bless you and your family throughout your life.

Follow the Lord's Example of Love

Every family can be strengthened in one way or another if the Spirit of the Lord is brought into our homes and we teach by His example.

- Act with faith; don't react with fear. When our teenagers begin testing family values, parents need to go to the Lord for guidance on the specific needs of each family member. This is the time for added love and support and to reinforce your teachings on how to make choices. It is frightening to allow our children to learn from the mistakes they may make, but their willingness to choose the Lord's way and family values is greater when the choice comes from within than when we attempt to force those values upon them. The Lord's way of love and acceptance is better than Satan's way of force and coercion, especially in rearing teenagers.

- Remember the Prophet Joseph Smith's words: "Nothing is so much calculated to lead people to forsake sin as to take them by the hand, and watch over them with tenderness. When persons manifest the least kindness and love to me, O what power it has over my mind, while the opposite course has a tendency to harrow up all the harsh feelings and depress the human mind" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [1976], 240).

Children Who Stray Will Return

- While we may despair when, after all we can do, some of our children stray from the path of righteousness, the words of Orson F. Whitney can comfort us: "Though some of the sheep may wander, the eye of the Shepherd is upon them, and sooner or later they will feel the tentacles of Divine Providence reaching out after them and drawing them back to the fold. Either in this life or the life to come, they will return. They will have to pay their debt to justice; they will suffer for their sins; and may tread a thorny path; but if it leads them at last, like the penitent Prodigal, to a loving and forgiving [mother's and] father's heart and home, the painful experience will not have been in vain. Pray for [our] careless and disobedient children; hold on to them with [our] faith. Hope on, trust on, till you see the salvation of God" (quoting Joseph Smith, in Conference Report, Apr. 1929, 110).

Single Adults and Extended Family Can Lend Strength

- What if you are single or have not been blessed with children? Do you need to be concerned about the counsel regarding families? Yes. It is something we all need to learn in earth life. Unmarried adult members can often lend a special kind of strength to the family, becoming a tremendous source of support, acceptance, and love to their families and the families of those around them.
- Many adult members of the extended family do much parenting in their own right. Grandparents, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews, cousins, and other family members can have great impact on the family. I want to express my appreciation for those in my own extended

family who have guided me by their example and testimony. Sometimes extended family members can say things parents cannot say without starting an argument. After a long heart-to-heart discussion with her mother, one young woman said: "It would be awful to tell you and Dad I had done something wrong. But it would be worse to tell Aunt Susan. I just couldn't let her down."

No Perfect Families

Knowing that we are in mortality to learn and to develop our faith, we should understand that there must be opposition in all things. During a family council in my own home, my wife said, "When you may think that someone has a perfect family, you just do not know them well enough."

Set House and Family in Order

Brothers and sisters, as parents let us heed the admonition, even the rebuke, given by the Lord to Joseph Smith and the leaders of the Church in 1833 to "set in order [our] own house" (D&C 93:43). "I have commanded you to bring up your children in light and truth" (D&C 93:40). "Set in order [our] family, and see that they are more diligent and concerned at home, and pray always, or they shall be removed out of their place" (D&C 93:50).

The prophets of our day have given a similar admonition and warning to parents to set in order our families. May we be blessed with the inspiration and love to meet opposition with faith within our families. We will then know that our trials are to draw us closer to the Lord and to one another. May we listen to a prophet's voice and set in order our own homes (see D&C 93:41–49). The family is strengthened as we draw near to the Lord, and each member of the family is strengthened as we lift and strengthen and love and care for one another. "Thee lift me and I'll lift thee, and we'll ascend together" (Quaker proverb).

May we be able to welcome and maintain the Spirit of the Lord in our homes to strengthen our families. That each of our family members can stay on the "strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life" (2 Nephi 31:18), I pray.

From an address by Elder Hales in the April 1999 general conference of the Church (see Conference Report, Apr. 1999, 39–44; or *Ensign*, May 1999, 32–34).