

Building Spiritual Patterns

You can provide safety and strength for your family by establishing patterns of spiritual living in your home.

By Karmel and Lloyd Newell

One morning, a family was gathered for scripture study when the phone rang. The mother picked up the phone, and her sister-in-law from New Jersey spoke frantically on the other end: “Hurry! Turn on the news.”

The day was September 11, 2001. The news told of a horrifying terrorist attack in New York City. The children were shaken. Going to school seemed a little scary now.

The parents turned off the TV, and the family knelt to pray. After the prayer, the eight-year-old daughter said, “It’s going to be all right. I think the terrorists are just like the Gadianton robbers. We don’t need to be afraid of them.” Peace replaced fear. As the children left for school, the mother and father turned to each other and said, “That’s why we do this every morning.”

The family was fortified during a time of great distress because they had established a pattern of family prayer and scripture study. When fear struck, it was natural for them to pray because they prayed together every day. When world events were upsetting, they found reassurance in the scriptures because that’s where they always found reassurance.

Thankfully, events this dramatic don’t happen every day. Most often the challenges our families face are less drastic, but they are real, and they can be dangerous. You and your

family can prepare to face life’s challenges by establishing patterns of spiritual living in your home.

What Is a Spiritual Pattern?

A pattern in a work of art, such as a piece of music or a quilt, is a repeating design of notes or colors. A work of art is often defined by the patterns it displays.

Spiritually speaking, patterns can work in our families the same way. President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) outlined some basic spiritual patterns when he counseled mothers: “Teach [your children] to pray while they are young. Read to them from the scriptures even though they may not understand all that you read. Teach them to pay their tithes and offerings on the first money they ever receive. Let this practice become a habit in their lives.”¹

These spiritual habits can become such a consistent part of our families that they help define who we are. They can unite family members, continue from one generation to the next, and give us a strong sense of stability, identity, and cohesion. Most important, they bring us closer to the Savior and help us overcome trials and temptations.

Beginning to Build

The patterns we hear in a beautiful piece of music don’t happen by chance; they must be carefully planned and



precisely executed. The same is true for spiritual patterns in our families. Without deliberate planning, it's easy for other activities to creep in and take precedence over spiritual patterns. Here are some tips for creating spiritual patterns in your home:

- Begin by discussing with your spouse the spiritual patterns you want to develop in your family.
- Prayerfully create a plan and present it in a family council.
- Decide on a regular time and place for the spiritual pattern. For example, one family decided to gather around the kitchen table for scripture study so there would be less contention and fewer distractions.
- Make it fun! Nothing quite compares with marching around the kitchen table singing “We Are All Enlisted”² after family prayer, or sipping hot chocolate together during scripture study on a cold morning, or watching your children act out an adventurous scripture story.
- Give spiritual patterns priority. Schedule other activities around them.
- Be creative and adapt to the needs of your family members. Scripture study for small children might last just a few minutes each day. A family home evening lesson for teenagers with lots of homework could be a well-planned 15 minutes. Remember that the length of time is not as important as consistency.
- Pray for inspiration for successfully integrating a spiritual pattern into your busy lives.

Following these guidelines is not a quick process. But through the patient repetition of small and simple acts, we can develop reliable spiritual patterns to strengthen our families, being assured that “by small means the Lord can bring about great things” (1 Nephi 16:29).

Persistence through Resistance

Because establishing spiritual patterns takes time, the rewards aren't always immediate. Parents may wonder if



their children are really benefiting from their efforts—especially when the kids quarrel, complain, or refuse to participate. Unfortunately, too many parents feel paralyzed by the seeming picture of perfection they see in the families around them, causing them to think: “Other families never get stuck in 1 Nephi like we do.” “Other families don’t argue during family night.” “Other families don’t forget to pray. What’s wrong with us?”

The truth is, no family is perfect. And failed attempts, instead of discouraging us, should reaffirm to us the need to keep trying. Marjorie Pay Hinckley, wife of President Gordon B. Hinckley, put this in perspective when she wrote in a family letter: “I have a new project, one chapter a day from each of the standard works. I have been on it for four days and am only three days behind. Better to have tried and failed than never to have tried.”³

Every family encounters resistance to establishing spiritual patterns. But when children resist, wise parents persist. President Hinckley shared this encouraging example from his own parents, who established a spiritual pattern of family night that included musical performances:

“In the beginning, we would laugh and make cute remarks about one another’s performance. But our parents persisted. We sang together. We prayed together. We listened quietly while Mother read Bible and Book of

Mormon stories. Father told us stories out of his memory. . . .

“Out of those simple little meetings, held in the parlor of our old home, came something indescribable and wonderful. Our love for our parents was strengthened. Our love for brothers and sisters was enhanced. Our love for the Lord was increased. An appreciation for simple goodness grew in our hearts.”⁴

Blessed for Your Efforts

The spiritual patterns you establish will bless your family and help you draw closer to each other and to the Lord. For example, one family wanted to bring greater meaning to their fast. They decided to remind each other of fast Sunday one day in advance, consider special needs for which they could fast, and begin their fast with a prayer. They agreed on a time to gather on Sunday to share feelings of gratitude. The mother concluded: “We feel the Spirit of the Lord more in our home, and we are more grateful. . . . Making fast Sunday more meaningful to our family has drawn us closer to each other and to the Lord.”⁵

Even if they don’t realize it at first, your children will be strengthened by the righteous habits you choose to create in your family. One young woman described how her parents put imaginary armor on her and her siblings before they left for school each day. This was meant to remind them of the spiritual armor that would protect them from evil. “I never really appreciated this until I was older,” she said. “I am just now realizing the significance of this ritual they created. . . . Even if it was something I thought was stupid, I know it had an impact on the way I lived my life.”⁶

Another young woman shared how she was affected by her mother’s persistence: “There was a time of decision early in my life where . . . I tried to separate myself from any situation where I might be reminded of my wrong choices. Yet my angel mother kept extending herself, even in the face of my blatant rejection. She constantly invited me to come to prayer and [scripture study], even when I refused to come. It was her consistency that helped me to repent.”⁷

When we consistently strive to strengthen our families and center our homes on Jesus Christ, the Lord will bless our efforts. We never really know when and how those blessings will manifest themselves. Perhaps your family or your children will face an intense crisis, as the family did on September 11, 2001, and the spiritual patterns you’ve established will provide the peace and strength to move forward with faith. More likely, a spiritual pattern will help you and your family withstand the temptations that subtly attack us every day. The Lord has promised, “Be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great” (D&C 64:33). ■

The authors live in Utah, USA.

NOTES

1. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Stand Strong against the Wiles of the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 99.
2. “We Are All Enlisted,” *Hymns*, no. 250.
3. *Glimpses into the Life and Heart of Marjorie Pay Hinckley*, ed. Virginia H. Pearce (1999), 79.
4. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Some Lessons I Learned as a Boy,” *Ensign*, May 1993, 54.
5. Staci Swinton Brooks, “Making More of Our Fast Sunday,” *Ensign*, Mar. 2004, 73.
6. Name withheld, first-person account, from data gathered by the authors.
7. Name withheld, first-person account, from data gathered by the authors.

TO BE GIVEN HIGHEST PRIORITY

“We counsel 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, Feb. 11, 1999, in *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 1.4.1.

