

Three Tools to Build a SACRED HOME

Everyday activities in our homes offer opportunities to practice love, service, obedience, and cooperation.

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For the pioneers, caring for their homes required heavy labor and protection from the harsh physical environment. Consider the story of Ann Howell Burt. She emigrated from Wales, married, and lived in a dugout in northern Utah during the summer of 1863. As a young mother she had to work hard to keep order and see to the needs of her family. She recorded in her journal:

“Some days ago, I killed a rattlesnake with my rolling pin, as he came crawling down the steps. I was just cooking supper and the baby was on the floor or rather the ground. . . . I was badly frightened. . . .

“ . . . A few days ago, while keeping the flies off the baby’s face as he slept . . . , I discovered . . . a large tarantula crawling toward the child. I seized the broomstick, thrust the end of it at the tarantula and when it took hold . . . I hurriedly put it into the fire.”¹

Though many of us may not have to worry about tarantulas and snakes invading our homes, we have even more dangerous influences threatening us. Our tarantulas and snakes are moral ones, and they are ever so subtle. They include disdain for household work, the difficulty of holding family mealtimes, changing roles for mothers and fathers, abortion, and the erosion of marriage through divorce, cohabitation, and same-sex marriage. It would be nice if we

could beat these invaders back with household implements, but we’ve lost many of our rolling pins and broomsticks.

Declining Home Life

Today it is normal to hear young women describe their goals for the future in terms of exciting career plans. These young women most likely also desire to be wives and mothers, but today it seems more appropriate to announce career goals first. Although we value these opportunities for women, motherhood and homemaking have almost disappeared from modern society as natural and valued pathways for women.

Instead the message seems to be that if mothers have access to modern conveniences to care for their homes and families, then they should be free to seek their own fulfillment. Home is often erroneously considered a place from which women need to break free. Some ideologies would even have women think that home duties limit their full potential, and women and men are tempted to disregard the important, everyday aspects of home life—thus the loss of our rolling pins and brooms.

While modern conveniences have delivered us from some of the work of caring for a home, they have led to a decline in home life. We are tempted to disregard the value of everyday home activities like having family meals, and in the process we lose important opportunities for individual and family growth. Author Cheryl Mendelson explains: “As people turn more and more to outside institutions to have their [everyday] needs met . . . , [our] skills and expectations . . . diminish, in turn decreasing the chance that people’s homes can satisfy their needs.”²



In general conference, President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) warned: “Many of the social restraints which in the past have helped to reinforce and to shore up the family are dissolving and disappearing. The time will come when only those who believe deeply and actively in the family will be able to preserve their families in the midst of the gathering evil around us.”³

Protecting Our Homes and Families

How can we successfully defend our homes from this “gathering evil” and progress toward our eternal goals?

First, we need to rediscover and preserve the sacred nature of the home and its purposes. In the Bible Dictionary we read, “Only the home can compare with the temple in sacredness.”⁴ If our homes compare to the temple, what is it about the home that makes it sacred? One dictionary defines *sacred* as “belonging to or dedicated to God; worthy of reverence; set apart for or dedicated to some person, object, or purpose; that [which] must not be violated or disregarded; properly immune, as from violence or interference.”⁵

Apply this idea of sacred to everyday activities in your home such as mealtime, music, recreation, laundry, and caring for your home and yard. Mundane activities can have a higher purpose and must not be disregarded; they give

us opportunities to develop and practice character virtues and ethical behavior. By doing these everyday activities, we can learn about moral truths and practice honesty, patience, charity, and brotherly kindness. Everyday work and recreation in the home provide rich contexts for children and adults to make choices and learn from them. For example, a child, a spouse, or even a roommate may choose to contribute in the home by seeing what needs to be done and doing it happily. Or he or she may wait to be asked and then complain about the inconvenience.

Everyday events in our home can seem so simple that we overlook their importance—like the children of Israel who were smitten by a plague of snakes. To be healed they had to just look at the brass serpent on a pole (see Numbers 21:8–9), but because it was so simple, many did not do it. “Because of the simpleness of the way, or the easiness of it, there were many who perished” (1 Nephi 17:41). Everyday activities in our homes may be simple, but *because* they are simple, frequent, and repeated, they offer important opportunities to build individuals and families.

Second, we need to make family mealtime a daily event. Today, many find it easier to graze individually in their kitchens, dine from their cars, or go to the nearest restaurant for a quick meal rather than prepare a meal



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and sit down together as a family.

What are we losing? Family meals have numerous beneficial effects. Evidence suggests that family meals help children have better nutrition,⁶ fewer psychological problems, and less risky or self-destructive behaviors.⁷ Family meals in a positive environment also play an important role in preventing unhealthy weight-control practices.⁸

The simple acts of creating a meal and enjoying it together help family members stay connected. The meal doesn't have to be elaborate to create a time to connect and get a feeling for each person's day. Outside distractions can be managed so that the emphasis is on passing food, talking, and interacting. Children learn to share family food instead of asking for individualized orders as they do in a restaurant. The regular family mealtime gives children a sense of security because they know what to expect at the end of each day. It is also a time to express gratitude to God in prayer for the meal and other blessings. Perhaps most important, the routine of family mealtimes can

promote informal gospel discussions.

Third, we need to recognize that family activities have temporal and spiritual effects. God has given us only spiritual commandments; none of them are temporal (see D&C 29:35). *Temporal* means lasting for time only. His commandments are everlasting. We can apply this to our homes by realizing that our actions on earth have eternal consequences. Our actions shape the person we become now and in the life to come. For example, as spouses "love and care for each other and for their children,"⁹ they foster the development of characteristics that enable them and their children to progress in eternity.

We learn lessons of life at home that build strong character. Family researcher Enola Aird reminds us that at home we learn how to work and how to govern ourselves, we learn manners and morals, we learn how to become self-reliant—or not.¹⁰ "Without parents' humanizing work, children may be quite smart, well-educated, and successful but so selfish, self-centered, and uncaring as to be essentially uncivilized—

not able to live in a spirit of community with others.”¹¹

If we realize the value of everyday life, we can see that even the smallest child can feel like a valued individual through something as mundane as folding laundry. Little children can match socks, sort colors, fold towels, and be recognized for their accomplishments. Over the years as the tasks' complexity increases, the children gain confidence in their ability to choose and do worthwhile things.

Lighting Our Homes

Family responsibilities are opportunities to practice gaining light and truth through obedience. Jesus Christ is the Light of the World. When we follow Him and keep His commandments, we walk in His light. The closer we follow, the more light and truth we have. We can model obedience for our children by paying attention to our responsibilities. For example, by learning to do chores regularly, parents and children can learn obedience and exactness in small things, which have less severe consequences. Then they are better prepared to keep commandments and make sacred covenants.

Among the important foundational instructions given when the Church was organized was the counsel to “attend to all family duties” (D&C 20:47, 51). Three years later some of the leading brethren of the Church were chastened for neglecting their family duties (see D&C 93:41–50). Today, in the family proclamation, we are reminded again of our sacred family duties.

We often think about family duties in terms of family prayer, home evening, and scripture reading, but we should also remember that activities like feeding and clothing ourselves help us practice love, service, obedience, and cooperation. These simple, everyday routines have great power in our lives.

Can we draw closer to the Lord through everyday living—through family meals and wholesome recreation? Absolutely. How much light do we want? The Lord promised, “He that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light” (D&C 50:24), and, “[I] will give unto the faithful line upon line, precept upon precept; and I will try you and prove you herewith” (D&C 98:12).



Prove faithful in the little things, and the bigger things will be added on. Opportunities to learn and practice in the home are sacred; they are times to grow spiritually and draw closer to the Savior. This process of growth is a life-long quest, and our home environment gives us repeated, sustained chances to practice becoming godlike individuals and families. ■

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NOTES

1. In Sophy Valentine, *Biography of Ann Howell Burt* (1916), 24–25.
2. *Home Comforts: The Art and Science of Keeping House* (1999), 7–8.
3. “Families Can Be Eternal,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, 4.
4. “Temple,” 781.
5. *The World Book Dictionary* (1984), “sacred,” 1830.
6. See Tami M. Videon and Carolyn K. Manning, “Influences on Adolescent Eating Patterns: The Importance of Family Meals,” *Journal of Adolescent Health*, May 2003, 365–73.
7. See Marla E. Eisenberg, Rachel E. Olson, Dianne Neumark-Sztainer, Mary Story, and Linda H. Bearinger, “Correlations between Family Meals and Psychosocial Well-Being among Adolescents,” *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, Aug. 2004, 792–96.
8. See Dianne Neumark-Sztainer, Melanie Wall, Mary Story, and Jayne A. Fulkerson, “Are Family Meal Patterns Associated with Disordered Eating Behaviors among Adolescents?” *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Nov. 2004, 350–59.
9. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Liabona*, Oct. 2004, 49; *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
10. See “On Rekindling a Spirit of ‘Home Training’: A Mother’s Notes from the Front,” in *Taking Parenting Public: The Case for a New Social Movement*, ed. Sylvia A. Hewlett, Nancy Rankin, and Cornel West (2002), 13–28.
11. “On Rekindling,” 19.