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Teaching in the Home—a Joyful and Sacred Responsibility

I plead for heaven's help as we strive to be Christlike teachers in our homes.

My dear wife, Julie, and I have raised six precious children, and we recently became empty nesters. How I miss having our children in our home on a full-time basis. I miss learning from them and teaching them.

Today I direct my remarks to all parents and all who desire to be parents. Many of you are raising children now. For others, that time might come soon. And for still others, parenthood may be a future blessing. I pray we all recognize the joyful and sacred responsibility it is to teach a child.¹

As parents, we introduce our children to Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. We help our children say their first prayer. We offer guidance and support as they enter the covenant path² through baptism. We teach them to obey God's commandments. We educate them about His plan for His children, and we help them recognize the whisperings of the Holy Ghost. We tell them stories of ancient prophets and encourage them to follow living ones. We pray for their triumphs and

ache with them during their trials. We testify to our children of temple blessings, and we strive to prepare them well to serve full-time missions. We offer loving counsel as our children

become parents themselves. But—even then—we never stop being their parents. We never stop being their teachers. We are never released from these eternal callings.

Today let's contemplate a few of the wonderful opportunities we have to teach our children in our homes.

Family Home Evening Teaching

Let's begin with family home evening, which was a high priority in the faith-filled home where I was raised. I don't remember specific lessons taught at family home evening, but I do remember that we never missed a week.³ I knew what was important to my parents.⁴

I recall one of my favorite family home evening activities. Dad would invite one of his children to take "The Test." He would give the child a series of instructions like, "First, go into the kitchen and open and close the fridge. Then run into my bedroom and grab



a pair of socks from my dresser. Then come back to me, jump up and down three times, and say, 'Dad, I did it!'

I loved it when it was my turn. I wanted to get every step just right, and I cherished the moment when I could say, "Dad, I did it!" This activity helped build my confidence and made it easier for a restless boy to pay attention when Mom or Dad taught a gospel principle.

President Gordon B. Hinckley counseled: "If you have any doubt about the virtue of family home evening, try it. Gather your children about you, teach them, bear testimony to them, read the scriptures together and have a good time together."⁵

There will always be opposition to holding family home evening.⁶ Regardless, I invite you to find a way around the obstacles and make family home evening a priority—and make fun a key ingredient.

Family Prayer Teaching

Family prayer is another prime opportunity to teach.

I love how President N. Eldon Tanner's father taught him during family prayer. President Tanner said this:

"I remember one evening when we were kneeling in family prayer, my father said to the Lord, 'Eldon did something today he shouldn't have done; he's sorry, and if you will forgive him, he won't do it anymore.'

"That made me determined not to do it anymore—much more than a trouncing would have done."⁷

As a boy, I would sometimes get irritated with our seemingly excessive family prayers, thinking to myself, "Didn't we just pray a few minutes ago?" Now, as a parent, I know we can't ever pray too much as a family.⁸

I've always been impressed with how Heavenly Father introduces Jesus



Christ as His Beloved Son.⁹ I enjoy praying for my children by name as they listen to me express to Heavenly Father how beloved they are to me. It seems there is no better time to communicate love to our children than when praying with them or blessing them. When families gather in humble prayer, powerful and lasting lessons are taught.

On-Call Teaching

Parental teaching is like being an on-call physician. We always need to be ready to teach our children because we never know when the opportunity will present itself.

We are like the Savior, whose teaching often "did not happen in a synagogue but in informal, everyday settings—while eating a meal with His disciples, drawing water from a well, or walking past a fig tree."¹⁰

Years ago my mother shared that her two best gospel conversations with my older brother, Matt, were once while she was folding laundry and another time while driving him

to the dentist. One of the many things I admired about my mother was her readiness to teach her children.

Her parental teaching never ended. While I was serving as a bishop, my mom, then 78 years old, told me I needed a haircut. She knew I needed to be an example, and she didn't hesitate to tell me so. I love you, Mom!

As a father, I am motivated to personally study and ponder the scriptures in order to be able to respond when my children or grandchildren present an on-call teaching opportunity.¹¹

"Some of the best teaching moments start as a question or concern in the heart of a [family] member."¹² Are we listening during those moments?¹³

I love the Apostle Peter's invitation: "Be ready always to give an answer to every man [and I add, child] that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you."¹⁴

When I was a teenager, my dad and I enjoyed challenging each other to see who had the strongest grip. We would squeeze the other's hand as tightly as possible in an effort to make the

other grimace in pain. It doesn't seem like much fun now, but somehow it was at the time. After one such battle, Dad looked me in the eyes and said, "You have strong hands, Son. I hope your hands always have the strength to never touch a young lady inappropriately." He then invited me to stay morally clean and help others do the same.

Elder Douglas L. Callister shared this about his father: "While traveling home from work one day Father spontaneously said, 'I paid my tithing today. I wrote "thank you" on the tithing check. I am so grateful to the Lord for blessing our family.'"

Elder Callister then paid this tribute to his father-teacher: "He taught both acts and attitudes of obedience."¹⁵

I think it wise to ask ourselves occasionally, "What will I teach, or what am I teaching, my children by my acts and attitudes of obedience?"

Family Scripture Study Teaching

Family scripture study is an ideal forum for teaching doctrine in the home.

President Russell M. Nelson said, "Not only are parents to cling to the word of the Lord, but they have a divine mandate to teach it to their children."¹⁶

As Julie and I raised our children, we tried to be consistent and creative. One year we decided to read the Book of Mormon in Spanish as a family. Was that why the Lord called each of our children who served a full-time mission to a Spanish-speaking mission? *Es posible*.

I was deeply touched when Brother Brian K. Ashton shared with me that he and his father read every page of the Book of Mormon together during his senior year of high school. Brother Ashton loves the scriptures. They are



written in his mind and on his heart. His father planted that seed when Brother Ashton was a teenager, and that seed¹⁷ has grown into a deep-rooted tree of truth. Brother Ashton has done the same with his older children.¹⁸ His eight-year-old son recently asked him, "Dad, when do I get to read the Book of Mormon with you?"

Example Teaching

Lastly, our most impactful parental teaching is our example. We are counseled to be "an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity."¹⁹

During a recent trip, Julie and I attended church and saw this verse in action. A young man, soon to leave for his mission, spoke in sacrament meeting.

He said, "You all think my dad is such a good man at church, but . . ." He paused, and I anxiously wondered what he might say next. He continued and said, "He's a better man at home."

I thanked this young man afterward for the inspiring tribute he had paid his father. I then found out that his father was the bishop of the ward. Even though this bishop was serving his ward faithfully, his son felt that his best work was done at home.²⁰

Elder D. Todd Christofferson counsels: "We have many avenues for teaching the . . . rising generation, and we should devote our best thinking and effort to taking full advantage of them. Above all, we must continue to encourage and help parents be better and more consistent teachers . . . especially by example."²¹

That's how the Savior teaches.²²

Last year, while on vacation with our two youngest children, Julie suggested we do proxy baptisms in both the St. George and San Diego Temples. I murmured—to myself—thinking, "We attend the temple at home, and now we're on vacation. Why not do something more vacation-like?" After the baptisms, Julie wanted to take

pictures outside the temple. I silently murmured—again. You can guess what happened next: we took pictures.

Julie wants our children to have memories of how we helped our ancestors, and so do I. We didn't need a formal lesson on the importance of temples. We were living it—thanks to a mother who loves the temple and wants her children to share that love.

As parents cherish each other and offer righteous examples, children are eternally blessed.

Conclusion

For all of you who are striving to do your best to teach in your homes, may you find peace and joy in your efforts. And if you feel you have room for improvement or need greater preparation, please humbly respond as the Spirit prompts you and bind yourself to act.²³

Elder L. Tom Perry said, "The health of any society, the happiness of its people, their prosperity, and their peace all find common roots in the teaching of children in the home."²⁴

Yes, my home nest is now empty, but I'm still on call, ready and eager to find additional precious opportunities to teach my grown children, their children, and someday, I hope, their children.

I plead for heaven's help as we strive to be Christlike teachers in our homes. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. See Doctrine and Covenants 68:25; 93:40. Elder L. Tom Perry taught: "The influence of the adversary is so widespread and he is attacking, attempting to erode and destroy the very foundation of our society, even the family. Parents must resolve that teaching in the home is a most sacred and important responsibility" ("Mothers Teaching Children in the Home," *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2010, 30).

- The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles have taught: "Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children. 'Children are an heritage of the Lord' (Psalm 127:3). Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, and to teach them to love and serve one another, observe the commandments of God, and be law-abiding citizens wherever they live. Husbands and wives—mothers and fathers—will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations" ("The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2017, 145).
2. See Russell M. Nelson, "As We Go Forward Together," *Ensign or Liahona*, Apr. 2018, 7.
3. Elder David A. Bednar said: "Today if you could ask our adult sons what they remember about family prayer, scripture study, and family home evening, I believe I know how they would answer. They likely would not identify a particular prayer or a specific instance of scripture study or an especially meaningful family home evening lesson as the defining moment in their spiritual development. What they would say they remember is that as a family we were consistent" ("More Diligent and Concerned at Home," *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2009, 19).
4. See "Home Can Be a Heaven on Earth," *Hymns*, no. 298.
5. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Gordon B. Hinckley* (2016), 171.
6. See 2 Nephi 2:11.

7. N. Eldon Tanner, "Never Be Ashamed of the Gospel of Christ," *Ensign*, Feb. 1980, 4.
8. See 3 Nephi 18:21.
9. See Matthew 3:16–17; 3 Nephi 11:6–8; Doctrine and Covenants 18:34–36; Joseph Smith—History 1:17.
10. "Take Advantage of Spontaneous Teaching Moments," *Teaching in the Savior's Way* (2016), 16. *Teaching in the Savior's Way* includes a variety of tips and tools for teaching in the home.
11. See Doctrine and Covenants 11:21; 84:85.
12. *Teaching in the Savior's Way*, 16.
13. See "Listen," *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (2004), 185–86.
14. 1 Peter 3:15.
15. Douglas L. Callister, "Most Influential Teacher—Emeritus Seventy Pays Tribute to Father," Aug. 29, 2016, news.lds.org.
16. Russell M. Nelson, "Set in Order Thy House," *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 70; *Liahona*, Jan. 2002, 81.
17. See Alma 32:28–43.
18. Sister Melinda Ashton pinch-hits when her husband, Brother Ashton, is out of town.
19. 1 Timothy 4:12; see also Alma 17:11.
20. Bishop Jeffrey L. Stewart serves in the Southgate Second Ward in St. George, Utah. Samuel, his son, is now serving in the Colombia Medellín Mission.
21. D. Todd Christofferson, "Strengthening the Faith and Long-Term Conversion of the Rising Generation," general conference leadership meeting, Sept. 2017.
22. See 3 Nephi 27:21, 27.
23. See Doctrine and Covenants 43:8–9.
24. L. Tom Perry, "Mothers Teaching Children in the Home," 30.

