

# Respect and Reverence

MARGARET S. LIFFERTH

First Counselor in the Primary General Presidency

*We must . . . cultivate in our homes and classrooms respect for each other and reverence for God.*



The last chapter of John tells of an especially tender exchange between Peter and the resurrected Christ. Three times the Savior asks, “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?” And each time, when Peter assures the Savior of his love, Jesus “saith unto him, Feed my lambs. . . . Feed my sheep.”<sup>1</sup>

There is great need in today’s world to nourish the souls of our children and youth with “living water”<sup>2</sup> and the “bread of life.”<sup>3</sup> Like Peter, we too love the Lord, so today’s parents and leaders work diligently to instill in each heart a testimony of Jesus Christ and His gospel. We teach in our homes, in missionary settings, and in

the chapels and classrooms of our churches. We prepare and invite the Spirit to be with us. But to truly be able to feed His lambs and nourish His sheep with testimony and the Spirit, we must also cultivate in our homes and classrooms respect for each other and reverence for God.

My appeal today is to parents, teachers, and leaders to work together to teach, exemplify, and encourage the standards of respect and reverence that will strengthen our children and youth and invite the spirit of worship into our homes and chapels.

May I suggest that our ability and our credibility to exemplify reverence for God is strengthened as we show respect for each other. In today’s society, the standards of decorum, dignity, and courtesy are assailed on every side and in every form of media. As parents and leaders, our examples of respect for each other are critical for our youth and children because they are watching not only the media—they are watching us! Are we the examples we need to be?

Ask yourself these questions: Am I an example of respect in my home by the way I treat those I love the most? What is my demeanor during a sports event? If my child has a disagreement with a teacher, coach, or peer, do I

listen to both sides of the issue? Do I show respect for the property of others as well as take care of my own? How do I respond to others with whom I disagree in matters of religion, lifestyle, or politics?

As parents and leaders exemplify and teach respect for others, we confirm in the hearts of our children that each of us is truly a child of God and all are brothers and sisters through eternity. We will focus on the things we have in common—on the qualities of heart that bind the family of God together, rather than on our differences.

Respect for others and reverence for God are close cousins. They are rooted in humility and love. President David O. McKay said that “reverence is profound respect mingled with love,”<sup>4</sup> and Elder L. Tom Perry taught that “reverence flows from our admiration and respect for Deity.”<sup>5</sup> Primary children learn this concept as they sing this verse from a Primary song:

*Rev’rence is more than just quietly sitting:  
It’s thinking of Father above,  
A feeling I get when I think of his blessings.  
I’m rev’rent, for rev’rence is love.*<sup>6</sup>

However, reverent behavior is not a natural tendency for most children. It is a quality that is taught by parents and leaders through example and training. But remember, if reverence is rooted in love, so is the teaching of it. Harshness in our training begets resentment, not reverence. So begin early and have reasonable expectations. A toddler *can* learn to fold his arms and get ready for prayer. But it takes time, patience, and consistency. Remember that we are not only teaching a child his first lessons in reverence, but the child may be mastering his first attempts at self-discipline.

This process of teaching and self-discipline continues line upon line

and precept upon precept. Thus a child learns to be reverent during prayers and the sacrament. He sits by his parents during the meeting. Then he grows in lessons of self-discipline as later he learns to fast, to obey the Word of Wisdom, to make good Internet choices, and to keep the law of chastity. We each grow in ability as well as understanding. We bless our children and youth as we exemplify, teach, and encourage them through this process because self-mastery is not only the root of self-respect, it is essential in inviting the Spirit to teach, confirm, and testify.

I remember a talk that President Boyd K. Packer gave in conference

almost 20 years ago entitled “Reverence Invites Revelation.”<sup>7</sup> That phrase has remained in my heart all these years. It reminds me that we *must* create in our hearts, our homes, and our meetings places of reverence that will invite the Spirit to comfort, guide, teach, and testify. Because when the Spirit testifies to each of us that God is our Father and Jesus Christ is our Savior, it is *that* revelation that will invite true reverence born of love and profound respect.

So, as parents and leaders, what can we do? We can exemplify reverence as we pray humbly, use the proper language of prayer, and speak

the names of Deity appropriately. We can handle the scriptures with respect and teach doctrine from them with conviction.

Reverence will increase as we show proper respect not only for the General Authorities but for local priesthood and auxiliary leaders as well. My stake president has been a dear friend for over 30 years, and as friends, we have always called each other by our first names. But because he serves in a calling of priesthood leadership—in public and certainly in a Church setting—I make a conscious effort to refer to him as President Porter. Teaching our children and youth that it is appropriate to address



our leaders as president, bishop, brother, and sister encourages respect and reverence. It also teaches the truth that leaders are called of God and have been given sacred responsibilities.

As parents and leaders, we *must* set the example of reverent behavior in our Church meetings. Our chapels provide places for many different functions, but on Sunday they are places of worship. We gather to renew covenants that will heal our souls. We come to learn doctrine and strengthen testimony. Missionaries bring their investigators. Only in an attitude of reverence can the Spirit confirm the truths of the gospel through the word of God, music, testimony, and prayer.

We are a friendly people and we love each other, but reverence will increase if our socializing is done in the foyer and if sacrament meeting begins with the prelude music, not the opening prayer. We encourage reverence when we take a crying child out of the chapel and find another room where we continue to listen to the meeting until the baby is calmed or a disruptive toddler is soothed. Reverence includes turning off our cell phones and BlackBerry devices. Texting or reading e-mails in a Church meeting is not only irreverent, it is distracting and signals a lack of respect for those around us. So we exemplify reverence by participating in the meeting, listening to the speakers, and singing the hymns of Zion together.

Our teachers in Primary, Sunday School, and the youth programs have unique opportunities to teach and exemplify respect and reverence. May I offer a few ideas.

First of all, love those in your class. Often the child who is the most disruptive needs your love the most.

Take the time to explain what reverence is and why it is important. Display a picture of the Savior. Define



behavior that is acceptable, and then be loving and consistent as you not only encourage it but expect it.

Be prepared. Prepare not only the material, but prepare yourself to teach with the Spirit. Many problems with reverence can be defused with a well-prepared lesson in which the students participate.

Talk with parents of children who have disabilities to determine a reasonable expectation for their child because every child deserves a chance to progress.

Use the resources of the ward to help. Often if there is a reverence problem with children or youth, there is a reverence problem in the ward. Take concerns to the ward council, where ward leaders can work together to increase respect and reverence on every level.<sup>8</sup>

Years ago President Packer promised the Lord's blessings to those who worship in reverence. Surely those promises apply today: "While we may not see an immediate, miraculous transformation, as surely as the Lord

lives, a quiet one will take place. The spiritual power in the lives of each member and in the Church will increase. The Lord will pour out his Spirit upon us more abundantly. We will be less troubled, less confused. We will find revealed answers to personal and family problems."<sup>9</sup>

I believe the promises of a prophet. I know that I have a loving Heavenly Father and that His Son, Jesus Christ, is my Savior. I pray that our increased reverence will reflect our deepest love for Them and improve our quest to feed Their sheep in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

#### NOTES

1. John 21:15–17.
2. See John 4:10–14.
3. John 6:48.
4. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, Apr. 1967, 86.
5. L. Tom Perry, "Serve God Acceptably with Reverence and Godly Fear," *Ensign*, Nov. 1990, 70.
6. "Reverence Is Love," *Children's Songbook*, 31.
7. See Boyd K. Packer, "Reverence Invites Revelation," *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 21–23.
8. See *Teaching, No Greater Call* (1999), 79–87.
9. *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 23.