



Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting

Supporting the Family

FEBRUARY 11, 2006

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

Published by
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
Salt Lake City, Utah

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Printed in the United States of America

English approval: 8/04

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Marriage Is Essential to His Eternal Plan

ELDER DAVID A. BEDNAR

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles



The Doctrinal Ideal of Marriage

We have been counseled strongly by the First Presidency to devote our best efforts to the strengthening of marriage and the home. Such instruction has never been more needed in the world than it is today, as the sanctity of marriage is attacked and the importance of the home is undermined.

Even though the Church and its programs support marriage and

family and generally are successful at doing so, we should always remember this basic truth: no instrumentality or organization can take the place of the home or perform its essential functions.¹ Consequently, today I will speak with you primarily as men and women, as husbands and wives, and as mothers and fathers and secondarily as priesthood and auxiliary leaders in the Church. My assignment is to discuss the essential role of eternal marriage in our Heavenly Father's plan of happiness.

We will focus on the doctrinal ideal of marriage. My hope is that a review of our eternal possibilities and a reminder about who we are and why we are here in mortality will provide direction, comfort, and sustaining hope for us all, regardless of our marital status or personal present circumstances. The disparity between the doctrinal ideal of marriage and the reality of daily life may seem at times to be quite large, but you gradually are doing and

becoming much better than you probably recognize.

I invite you to keep in mind the following questions as we discuss principles related to eternal marriage.

Question 1: *In my own life, am I striving to become a better husband or a wife, or preparing to be a husband or a wife, by understanding and applying these basic principles?*

Question 2: *As a priesthood or auxiliary leader, am I helping those I serve to understand and apply these basic principles, thereby strengthening marriage and the home?*

As we prayerfully ponder these questions and consider our own marriage relationships and our responsibilities in the Church, I testify the Spirit of the Lord will enlighten our minds and teach us the things we need to do and to improve (see John 14:26).

Why Marriage Is Essential

In "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles proclaim "that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children."² This keynote sentence of the proclamation teaches us much about the doctrinal significance of marriage and emphasizes the primacy of marriage and family in the Father's plan. Righteous marriage is a commandment and an essential step in the process of creating a loving



family relationship that can be perpetuated beyond the grave.

Two compelling doctrinal reasons help us to understand why eternal marriage is essential to the Father's plan.

Reason 1: *The natures of male and female spirits complete and perfect each other, and therefore men and women are intended to progress together toward exaltation.*

The eternal nature and importance of marriage can be fully understood only within the overarching context of the Father's plan for His children. "All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and . . . has a divine nature

and destiny."³ The great plan of happiness enables the spirit sons and daughters of Heavenly Father to obtain physical bodies, to gain earthly experience, and to progress toward perfection.

"Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose"⁴ and in large measure defines who we are, why we are here upon the earth, and what we are to do and become. For divine purposes, male and female spirits are different, distinctive, and complementary.

After the earth was created, Adam was placed in the Garden of Eden. Importantly, however, God said it was "not good

that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18; Moses 3:18), and Eve became Adam's companion and helpmeet. The unique combination of spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional capacities of both males and females were needed to implement the plan of happiness. Alone, neither the man nor the woman could fulfill the purposes of his or her creation.

By divine design, men and women are intended to progress together toward perfection and a fulness of glory. Because of their distinctive temperaments and capacities, males

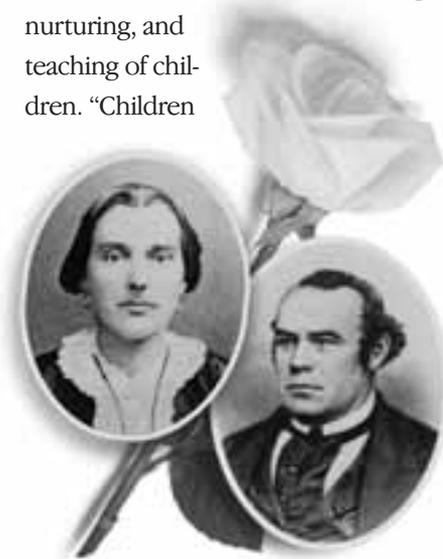
and females each bring to a marriage relationship unique perspectives and experiences. The man and the woman contribute differently but equally to a oneness and a unity that can be achieved in no other way. The man completes and perfects the woman and the woman completes and perfects the man as they learn from and mutually strengthen and bless each other. “Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, *in the Lord*” (1 Corinthians 11:11; italics added).

Reason 2: *By divine design, both a man and a woman are needed to bring children into mortality and to provide the best setting for the rearing and nurturing of children.*

The commandment given anciently to Adam and Eve to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force today. “God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife. . . . The means by which mortal life is created [are] divinely appointed.”⁵ Thus, marriage between a man and a woman is the authorized channel through which premortal spirits enter mortality. Complete sexual abstinence before marriage and total fidelity within marriage protect the sanctity of this sacred channel.

A home with a loving and loyal husband and wife is the supreme setting in which children can be reared in love and righteousness and in which the

spiritual and physical needs of children can be met. Just as the unique characteristics of both males and females contribute to the completeness of a marriage relationship, so those same characteristics are vital to the rearing, nurturing, and teaching of children. “Children



Elder Parley P. Pratt expressed beautifully the blessings that come as we learn about, understand, and strive to apply the doctrinal ideal of marriage.

are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity.”⁶

Guiding Principles

The two doctrinal reasons we have reviewed about the importance of eternal marriage in the Father’s plan of happiness suggest guiding principles for those who are preparing to marry, for those who are married, and for our service in the Church.

Principle 1: *The importance of eternal marriage can be understood only within the context of the Father’s plan of happiness.*

We frequently speak about and highlight marriage as a fundamental unit of society, as the foundation of a strong nation, and as a vital sociological and cultural institution. But the restored gospel helps us to understand that it is so much more!

Do we perhaps talk about marriage without adequately teaching the importance of marriage in the Father’s plan? Emphasizing marriage without linking it to the simple and fundamental doctrine of the plan of happiness cannot provide sufficient direction, protection, or hope in a world that grows increasingly confused and wicked. We would all do well to remember the teaching of Alma—that “God gave unto [the children of men] commandments, *after* having made known unto them the plan of redemption” (Alma 12:32; italics added).

Elder Parley P. Pratt expressed beautifully the blessings that come to us as we learn about, understand, and strive to apply in our lives the doctrinal ideal of marriage:

“It was Joseph Smith who taught me how to prize the endearing relationships of father and mother, husband and wife; of brother and sister, son and daughter.

“It was from him that I learned that the wife of my bosom might be secured to me for time and all eternity; and that the refined sympathies



and affections which endeared us to each other emanated from the fountain of divine eternal love. . . .

“I had loved before, but I knew not why. But now I loved—with a pureness—an intensity of elevated, exalted feeling, which would lift my soul from the transitory things of this grovelling sphere and expand it as the ocean. . . . In short, I could now love with the spirit and with the understanding also.

“Yet, at that time, my dearly beloved brother, Joseph Smith, had . . . merely lifted a corner of the veil and given me a single glance into eternity.”⁷

As men and women, as husbands and wives, and as Church leaders, can we see how the importance of eternal marriage can be understood only within the context of the Father’s plan of happiness? The doctrine of the plan leads men and women to hope and prepare for eternal marriage, and it defeats the fears and overcomes the

uncertainties that may cause some individuals to delay or avoid marriage. A correct understanding of the plan also strengthens our resolve to steadfastly honor the covenant of eternal marriage. Our individual learning, our teaching, and our testifying in both the home and at church will be magnified as we ponder and more fully understand this truth.

Principle 2: *Satan desires that all men and women might be miserable like unto himself.*

Lucifer relentlessly assails and distorts the doctrines that matter most to us individually, to our families, and to the world. Where is the adversary focusing his most direct and diabolical attacks? Satan works unremittingly to confuse understanding about gender, to promote the premature and unrighteous use of procreative power, and to hinder righteous marriage precisely because marriage is ordained of God and the family is central to the

plan of happiness. The adversary’s attacks upon eternal marriage will continue to increase in intensity, frequency, and sophistication.

Because today we are engaged in a war for the welfare of marriage and the home, in my latest reading of the Book of Mormon I paid particular attention to the ways the Nephites prepared for their battles against the Lamanites. I noted that the people of Nephi “were *aware of the intent* of [their enemy], and therefore they did prepare to meet them” (Alma 2:12; italics added). As I read and studied, I learned that *understanding the intent of an enemy* is a key prerequisite to effective preparation. We likewise should consider the intent of our enemy in this latter-day war.

The Father’s plan is designed to provide direction for His children, to help them become happy, and to bring them safely home to Him. Lucifer’s attacks on the plan are intended to make the sons and daughters of God confused and unhappy and to halt their eternal progression. The overarching intent of the father of lies is that all of us would become “miserable like unto himself” (2 Nephi 2:27), and he works to warp the elements of the Father’s plan he hates the most. Satan does not have a body, he cannot marry, and he will not have a family. And he persistently strives to confuse the divinely appointed purposes of gender, marriage, and family. Throughout the world, we see growing evidence of the effectiveness of Satan’s efforts.

More recently the devil has attempted to combine and legally validate confusion about gender and marriage. As we look beyond mortality and into eternity, it is easy to discern that the counterfeit alternatives the adversary advocates can never lead to the completeness that is made possible through the sealing together of a man and a woman, to the happiness of righteous marriage, to the joy of posterity, or to the blessing of eternal progression.

Given what we know about our enemy's intent, each of us should be especially vigilant in seeking personal inspiration as to how we can protect and safeguard our own marriages—and how we can learn and teach correct principles in the home and in our Church assignments about the eternal significance of gender and of the role of marriage in the Father's plan.

Principle 3: *The ultimate blessings of love and happiness are obtained through the covenant relationship of eternal marriage.*

The Lord Jesus Christ is the focal point in a covenant marriage relationship. Please notice how the Savior is positioned at the apex of this triangle, with a woman at the base of one corner and a man at the base of the other corner. Now consider what happens in the relationship between the man and the woman as they individually and steadily “come unto Christ” and strive to be “perfected in Him” (Moroni 10:32). Because of and through the Redeemer, the man and

the woman come closer together.

As a husband and wife are each drawn to the Lord (see 3 Nephi 27:14), as they learn to serve and cherish one another, as they share life experiences and grow together and become one, and as they are blessed through the uniting of their distinctive natures, they begin to realize the fulfillment that our Heavenly Father desires for His children. Ultimate happiness, which is the very object of the Father's



Husband and wife draw closer together as they individually and steadily come unto Christ.

plan, is received through the making and honoring of eternal marriage covenants.

As men and women, as husbands and wives, and as Church leaders, one of our paramount responsibilities is to help young men and women learn about and prepare for righteous marriage through our personal example. As young women and men observe worthiness, loyalty, sacrifice, and the honoring of covenants in our marriages, then those youth will seek to emulate the same principles in their courting and marriage relationships. As young people notice that we have

made the comfort and convenience of our eternal companion our highest priority, then they will become less self-centered and more able to give, to serve, and to create an equal and enduring companionship. As young women and men perceive mutual respect, affection, trust, and love between a husband and a wife, then they will strive to cultivate the same characteristics in their lives. Our children and the youth of the Church will learn the most from what we do and what we are—even if they remember relatively little of what we say.

Unfortunately many young members of the Church today are fearful of and stumble in their progress toward eternal marriage because they have seen too much of divorce in the world and of broken covenants in their homes and in the Church.

Eternal marriage is not merely a temporary legal contract that can be terminated at any time for almost any reason. Rather, it is a sacred covenant with God that can be binding in time and throughout all eternity. Faithfulness and fidelity in marriage must not simply be attractive words spoken in sermons; rather, they should be principles evident in our own covenant marriage relationships.

As we consider the importance of our personal example, do you and I discern areas where we need to improve? Is the Holy Ghost inspiring our minds and softening our hearts and encouraging us to do and to become better? As priesthood and

auxiliary leaders, are we focusing our efforts on strengthening marriage and the home?

Husbands and wives need time together to fortify themselves and their homes against the attacks of the adversary. As we strive to magnify our callings in the Church, are we unintentionally hindering husbands and wives and mothers and fathers from fulfilling their sacred responsibilities in the home? For example, do we sometimes schedule unnecessary meetings and activities in a way that interferes with the essential relationship between a husband and a wife and their relationships with children?

As we sincerely ponder these questions, I am confident the Spirit is even now helping and will continue to help each of us learn the things we should do at home and in the Church.

The Spiritual Resources We Need

Our responsibilities to learn and understand the doctrine of the plan, to uphold and be examples of righteous marriage, and to teach correct principles in the home and at church may cause us to wonder if we are equal to the task. We are ordinary people who must accomplish a most extraordinary work.

Many years ago, Sister Bednar and I were busy trying to meet the countless competing demands of a young and energetic family—and of Church, career, and community responsibilities. One evening after the children were asleep, we talked at length about



One of our paramount responsibilities is to help young men and women learn about and prepare for righteous marriage through our personal example.

how effectively we were attending to all of our important priorities. We realized that we would not receive the promised blessings in eternity if we did not honor more fully the covenant we had made in mortality. We resolved together to do and to be better as a husband and a wife. That lesson learned so many years ago has made a tremendous difference in our marriage.

The sweet and simple doctrine of the plan of happiness provides precious eternal perspective and helps us understand the importance of eternal marriage. We have been blessed with all of the spiritual resources we need. We have the fulness of the doctrine of Jesus Christ. We have the Holy Ghost and revelation. We have saving ordinances, covenants, and temples. We have priesthood and prophets. We have the holy scriptures and the

power of the word of God. And we have The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

I testify that we have been blessed with all of the spiritual resources we need to learn about, to teach, to strengthen, and to defend righteous marriage—and that indeed we can live together in happiness as husbands and wives and families in eternity. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. See First Presidency letter, Feb. 11, 1999; or *Liabona*, Dec. 1999, 1; *Ensign*, June 1999, 80.
2. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Liabona*, Oct. 2004, 49; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
3. *Liabona*, Oct. 2004, 49; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
4. *Liabona*, Oct. 2004, 49; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
5. *Liabona*, Oct. 2004, 49; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
6. *Liabona*, Oct. 2004, 49; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
7. *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, ed. Parley P. Pratt Jr. (1938), 297–98.

A Solemn Responsibility to Love and Care for Each Other

ELDER L. TOM PERRY

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles



Balancing Our Responsibilities

The subject I have been assigned is the following sentence from the proclamation on the family: “Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children.”¹ I want to approach this subject in a very different manner than you might be familiar with in

other training meetings. I will not quote much from handbooks; instead, I want to talk to you heart to heart about your service in our Father in Heaven’s kingdom. The purpose will be to see if together we can better understand how to balance our responsibilities to love and care for our families with the other special callings our Father in Heaven has given to us.

As the Church was being organized on April 6, 1830, the Prophet Joseph Smith received a revelation that is now recorded in the 21st section of the Doctrine and Covenants. A portion of the revelation reads:

“Behold, there shall be a record kept among you; and in it thou shalt be called a seer, a translator, a prophet, an apostle of Jesus Christ, an elder of the church through the will of God the Father, and the grace of your Lord Jesus Christ,

“Being inspired of the Holy Ghost to lay the foundation thereof, and to build it up unto the most holy faith. . . .

“Wherefore, meaning the church, thou shalt give heed unto all his words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me;

“For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith” (D&C 21:1–2, 4–5).

Among the first instructions given to this newly organized Church was to follow the inspiration and revelation that comes from the Lord, through His prophet, in fulfilling our responsibilities to build His kingdom. He has promised to direct us in the course that should be ours to carry on this great work.

The Prophet’s Counsel

I think President Gordon B. Hinckley, our prophet today, gave us the key to balance our responsibilities in an earlier worldwide leadership training meeting, held on June 21, 2003. In that broadcast he stated:

“Yours . . . is the privilege of standing in the shadow of the Redeemer of the world as we carry forward this work. Yours is the opportunity to speak of the beauty of the atoning blood of the Lord Jesus Christ in behalf of His sons and daughters. Could there be a greater privilege than this?

“Rejoice in the privilege which is yours. Your opportunity will not last forever. Too soon there will be only



In all periods of history, God has given His divine law to safeguard and protect the holy union between husband and wife.

the memory of the great experience you are now having.

“None of us will accomplish all we might wish to. But let us do the best we can. I am satisfied that the Redeemer will then say, ‘Well done, thou good and faithful servant’ (Matthew 25:21).”²

As you remember, in that broadcast he explained our fourfold responsibility. The first applies to the subject we are addressing in this broadcast. He stated:

“First, it is imperative that you not neglect your families. Nothing you have is more precious. Your wives and your children are deserving of the attention of their husbands and fathers. When all is said and done, it is this family relationship which we will take with us into the life beyond. To paraphrase the words of scripture, ‘What shall it profit a man

though he serve the Church faithfully and lose his own family?’ (see Mark 8:36).”³

This has been a continuing message from our prophets since the early days of the organization of the Church. The most important place for gospel teaching and leadership is in the family and in the home. If we follow these instructions, we will give assignments and plan programs, activities, and classes which will complement and support our families.

Establishing Proper Priorities

How we use our time and keep our lives in balance is fundamental to how we will perform our family duties and our Church service. Discipline yourself to follow the prophet’s counsel on how you prioritize the use of your time.

Your Eternal Companion

Begin by discussing with your eternal companion how much time you need together to strengthen your marriage, to demonstrate the love you have for each other. That is your first priority.

The Church is to help individuals and families come unto Christ and obtain eternal life. Eternal life is God’s greatest gift to His children, and it is obtained only through a family relationship. This relationship must start with the union between husband and wife, which is sacred to the Lord and is something not to be trifled with. The marriage covenant is essential for the Lord’s plan and is the purpose for which He created the heavens and the earth. In all periods of history, He has given His divine law to safeguard and protect the holy union between husband and wife.



The most important instruction children will ever receive should come from their parents.

Your Children

Second, consider the spiritual needs of your children. How much time is necessary to be certain you are being close to them? It is your responsibility as fathers and mothers to provide adequate time to teach them, for the most important instruction children will ever receive should come from their parents. We need to be familiar with what the Church is teaching our children so that we can be in harmony with that teaching in our instructions to each child. For example, the pamphlet *For the Strength of Youth*, quoting the proclamation on the family, gives young people this counsel about families:

“Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Successful marriages and families are established and

maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities.”⁴

The pamphlet continues:

“Being part of a family is a great blessing. Your family can provide you with companionship and happiness, help you learn correct principles in a loving atmosphere, and help you prepare for eternal life. Not all families are the same, but each is important in Heavenly Father’s plan.

“Do your part to build a happy home. Be cheerful, helpful, and considerate of others. Many problems in the home are created because family members speak and act selfishly or unkindly. Concern yourself with the needs of other family members. Seek to be a peacemaker rather than to tease, fight, and quarrel. Remember that the family is the most sacred unit of the Church.”⁵

Providing for Your Family

Our third priority is to provide for our family units. Again from the proclamation on the family:

“By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families.”⁶

We need to maintain good skills to be gainfully employed. In a changing world, we must keep up-to-date, or our skills will become obsolete. Even though we are busy in Church assignments, we should not pass up opportunities to increase our development and improve the welfare of our families. This requires that we invest adequate time and thought to preparing for the future.

This counsel applies to the sisters as well as the brethren. Although the responsibility to provide for the family belongs primarily to fathers, the

proclamation indicates that “disability, death, or other circumstances”⁷ may also require you sisters to use and develop your skills to provide for your families.

Church Service

Fourth in our priority is our commitment to the time we spend in Church activities. Active Latter-day Saint families value their Church time and make choices in their family life to make room for it.

Leaders need to be especially sensitive to different family situations when they extend calls and create expectations. Families with young children where both parents have demanding calls that take them out of the home are the most likely to feel that Church activities interfere with their family life. Church leaders can help by acknowledging and validating members’ efforts to balance Church

We can increase our association with our families while we serve in Church callings.



service with their family responsibilities.

Involving Family Members

There are ways to increase our association with our families while we serve in our Church callings by involving our families, when appropriate, in our Church service. Let me give you one personal example.

My father served as my bishop during the early years of my life. He was a busy man with a demanding legal practice. He was also active in civic affairs and in demand as a public speaker. And, of course, he was the father of six children. I was always grateful that my father had his priorities right. Mother was always his first priority. It was evident by the way he treated her. This was followed by a real dedication to each of his children.

When I was about six years old, I received a red wagon as a Christmas gift. It was exactly like this one in

miniature. The little red wagon provided a real bond between my father and me. In his busy life, he had to find ways of involving his



family in activities without diminishing his own productivity.

Much of his service as a bishop occurred during the Great Depression in the 1930s. Many of our ward members were in desperate need. As the bishop, he had the responsibility of supplying the means to sustain their lives. This seemed to be a good activity for a bishop, his son, and the little red wagon.

I would come home from school and find stacks on the side of the garage—flour, sugar, wheat, and other commodities. I knew that that evening my father and I would have the opportunity of being together.

When he would arrive home, the little red wagon was loaded with supplies to take to a family. The two of us, walking and talking together, would complete our welfare assignment by delivering the commodities to those in need.

I was able to witness firsthand the love and care a good priesthood leader had for his ward members. More important, I had an opportunity of spending precious time with my father.

Focusing on Basic Priorities

Let me encourage you to do what we taught you in the first worldwide leadership training meeting. We remind you that all units of the Church are at different stages of development, and all units have different needs. When we are planning our Church programs, the families



must be taken into consideration.

Again, we caution you not to burden your membership with more than one Church calling, plus home teaching and visiting teaching. Discipline yourself to stick to the basic priorities, and you will be surprised how the inspiration of the Lord will direct you as you carry on your responsibilities to be a servant in His kingdom.

The ultimate focus of the restored Church is to facilitate and bring about opportunities for us to assist the Lord in His work to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. We do this primarily by strengthening families. In an age of moral decline, political uncertainty, international unrest, and economic instability, our focus on strengthening and stabilizing families must be enhanced and magnified. The very purpose of the

Church is to assist families in obtaining salvation and exaltation in the eternal kingdom of heaven.

The Family Guidebook

Several years ago we published a special *Family Guidebook*. It was for the use of members, especially those who are new converts or have limited Church experience. We encourage you to use it. It begins with a statement:

“The family is the basic unit of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the most important social unit in time and eternity. God has established families to bring happiness to His children, allow them to learn correct principles in a loving atmosphere, and prepare them for eternal life.



“The home is the best place to teach, learn, and apply gospel principles.”⁸

Again, we encourage you to refer to this booklet’s helpful teachings.

The Savior’s Example

Our Lord and Savior ministered personally to the people, lifting the downtrodden, giving hope to the discouraged, and seeking out the lost. By His words and actions, He showed the people that He loved and understood and appreciated them. He recognized the divine nature and eternal worth of each individual. Even when calling people to repentance, He condemned the sin without condemning the sinner.

Like our Savior, as Church leaders we should love the people we serve, showing care and concern for each one individually. May the Lord bless us in the sacred responsibility He has given us is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Liabona*, Oct. 2004, 49; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
2. “Rejoicing in the Privilege to Serve,” *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, June 21, 2003, 24.
3. *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, June 21, 2003, 22.
4. *Liabona*, Oct. 2004, 49; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
5. *For the Strength of Youth* (pamphlet, 2001), 10.
6. *Liabona*, Oct. 2004, 49; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
7. *Liabona*, Oct. 2004, 49; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
8. *Family Guidebook* (2001), 1.

The Family Guidebook (item no. 31180) may be obtained through Church distribution centers and service centers.



Parents Have a Sacred Duty

BONNIE D. PARKIN

Relief Society General President



Family Responsibilities

If I could have one thing happen for parents and leaders of this Church, it would be that they feel the love of the Lord in their lives each day as they care for Heavenly Father's children. It may not be something that I say that touches your heart, but what the Spirit whispers to you. Follow those sweet promptings.

I distinctly remember when the proclamation on the family was given: September 23, 1995. I was seated in the Tabernacle at the general Relief Society meeting. President Hinckley was the concluding speaker. He

presented "The Family: A Proclamation to the World." Stillness was in the congregation but also a sense of excitement, a reaction of "Yes—we need help with our families!"

I remember feeling it was so right. Tears ran down my cheeks. As I looked at the sisters seated near me, they seemed to be experiencing similar feelings. There was so much in the proclamation that I couldn't wait to get a copy and study it. The proclamation affirms the dignity of women.

And to think that it was first given to the women of the Church at the general Relief Society meeting—I know President Hinckley values women.

We are all here as Church leaders. We're busy. But I have to remember—just like you do—that our first responsibility is to our own family. Remember, they are one of the few blessings we get to take with us to the eternities!¹ Newel K. Whitney was a bishop in the early Church in Kirtland. Like you bishops today, he must have been pretty busy doing lots of good things. But he was chastened by the Lord and commanded to "set in order *bis* family" (D&C 93:50; italics added). Sisters

and brothers, this counsel applies to all of us.

Many of you are parents or grandparents, or someday you may be. But married or not, we are all members of families. Take a minute and think about your own family. What do you love about them? One thing I love about mine is I rejoice that my four sons love to be together.

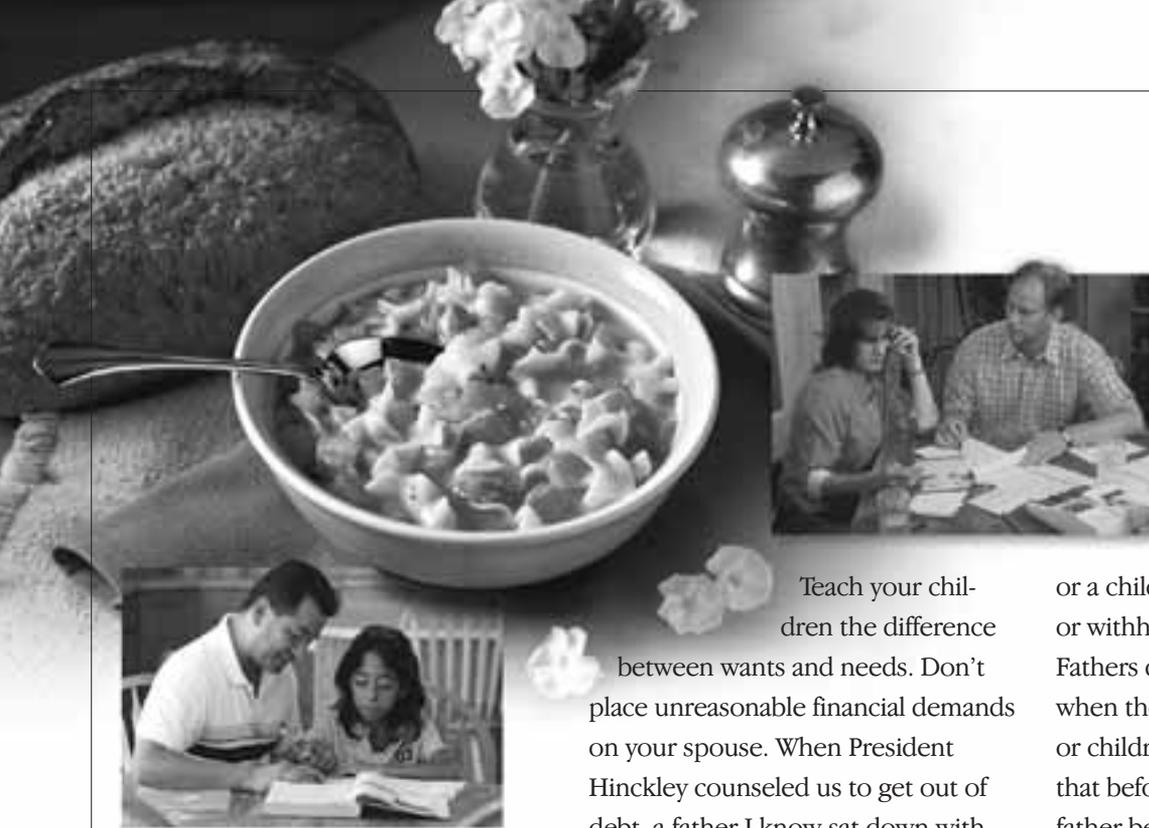
What doctrine on the family does the proclamation teach? I'd like to focus on one paragraph: "By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners."²

I love the words "by divine design." Parenting is part of our Heavenly Father's divine design for His children. As parents, we have divine responsibility to provide, protect, and nurture our families.

How can these guidelines—to *provide*, *protect*, and *nurture*—help us to rear righteous children?

Provide

The proclamation says parents provide "the necessities of life." But what are those necessities? Yes, they are a roof overhead, and they are food on the table. But because of the gospel plan, we know there is more than



that. They include skills—the things that build character. Let’s look at just a few.

We provide for our children as we teach them how to work. Let me tell you about my grandson Jacob. He did not want to go to school. His mother had tried so many things. Finally she sat him down and said, “Daddy’s job is to go to work and earn money. My job is to stay home and take care of you and your brothers and sister. And your job, Jacob, is to go to school.” When Jacob understood the principle, he accepted it and went to school.

We also teach our children to work by expecting them to do chores and, when appropriate, to work outside the home. We help our children provide for their lifetimes by teaching them the value of work. Start early! My husband says the greatest gift his father gave him was independence—because he taught him to work.

Managing our finances also helps us to be good providers. As parents, plan together to live on a budget.

Teach your children the difference between wants and needs. Don’t place unreasonable financial demands on your spouse. When President Hinckley counseled us to get out of debt, a father I know sat down with his married children and asked them about their finances. He was surprised to find that two had serious debt. He then asked them if he could help them make a plan.

Education and training enable parents to provide. Encourage your children to get all the education they can. In some countries, young people cannot qualify for Perpetual Education Fund loans because they have not completed secondary schooling. In today’s world, it is so important that parents continue to learn.

Protect

The second guideline I would like to talk about is *protect*. Protection from what? From harm—both physical and spiritual. We protect when we teach our children that they have divine worth, when we go to church as a family, when we have family home evening, when we have family prayer, when we study the scriptures together. That’s all pretty simple stuff, but I testify to you that it provides powerful protection.

The proclamation teaches that parents have a sacred duty to protect their children. Abuse can be emotional, such as talking down to a spouse

or a child, treating them as worthless, or withholding love and affection. Fathers do not protect their families when they beat or strike their wives or children. A West African sister said that before joining the Church, her father beat her mother and the children. “Now,” she said, “he treats us with respect and tenderness because he understands we are children of God.”

Parents protect their children by knowing their choice of friends. One teenage girl was angry when her father questioned her about her evening’s activities. The father explained that the proclamation said he should be a protector of his family and that he loved his daughter, and that was why he wanted to be sure she was safe.

We must also protect our children from the influences of the media. Know what your children are watching on the television, in the theaters, and in their friends’ homes. If you have a computer in your home, make sure it is a tool for those things that are “virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy” (Articles of Faith 1:13).

We are protected as we follow the living prophet. How have you been protected as a family by following President Hinckley’s counsel to read

the Book of Mormon? I recently received a note from a sister in England. She wrote:

“My family has struggled in the last year with a father who has chosen not to attend church any longer. He has been active all his life and has been in bishoprics. My heart has cried to the Lord about what I can do to not feel resentment and bitterness. I have family home evening and prayer on my own with the children. While in the temple I felt prompted, because of the challenge to read the Book of Mormon, to not have scripture time alone with the children but take the children and the scriptures to my husband, wherever he may be in the house. So off we march, every night at 9:00, to find him. He reads with us—not at first, but now he does. He is coming to church, meeting with us



in family home evening, and leading gospel discussions. My children were the Lord's feet and carried the words of redeeming love to my husband. This has been a great blessing to my family.”

Nurture

The third and the last guideline is *nurture*. What does nurturing look like? What does it feel like? What does it sound like? Nurturing looks like, feels like, and sounds like this scripture: “By persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; by kindness” (D&C 121:41–42). Let me share just a few examples.

I think nurturing looks like disciplining with love. One young mother stops her child



when he doesn't obey. She cups her hands around his face, looking him in the eyes, and says, “Listen to my words.” We must teach our children to make wise choices, but we can't remove the consequences of their actions. Remember, the basis of our Heavenly Father's plan is agency.

What does nurturing feel like? Much of the teaching and relationship building in families takes place in those brief, unplanned moments during our daily routine. The dinner table is a place to connect with each other, share our daily activities, listen to and encourage each other, and even laugh together. I know laughter lightens the load. Dear mothers and fathers, make a regular mealtime for the people you love.

Are you done parenting when your children are all grown and on their own? No, the deal is that you're never



done. But we're in this great business of creating eternal families. While my husband and I were serving a mission in England, one of our sons and his family came to visit. I remember him saying, "We came because we needed to be nurtured." Once a parent, always a parent. Isn't that the best? As I finished reading the Book of Mormon in December, I was struck with the realization that even Mormon counseled his adult son Moroni: "My son, be faithful in Christ; . . . may Christ lift thee up . . . and his mercy and long-suffering, and the hope of his glory and eternal life, rest in your mind forever" (Moroni 9:25).

What does nurturing sound like? Sometimes it's hard to get more than one-word answers from a teenager. Here's a question that I've found to be extremely helpful in changing that: "What is the biggest challenge or struggle you have right now?" This question opens the door for youth to share. And when they do, just listen! Don't judge or counsel or anything else. Just listen. You'll be amazed at the connections and bonds that will be formed. Bishops and counselors, this very same question can be powerful as you interview the youth in your wards.

Nurturing sounds like family prayer. One of my most lasting memories of my father is kneeling with my brothers and sister by my parents' bed in their small room and hearing my father plead with Heavenly Father to bless our mother, who was in the

hospital. Hearing my father pour out his heart helped me know that there was a God in heaven who listens. Pray for your children about their school-work and for their protection during the day. Our children know of our love and expectations when they hear us pray for them.

Strengthening Families

As a leader, how do you strengthen and support the families of those you serve? You can use those same guidelines—provide, protect, and nurture—to strengthen your ward families.

Leaders support parents by honoring them, not by stepping in front to take over a child. You can be a mentor, you can share like interests, but defer to how the parents would like to have things done. One mother shared: "It has often seemed to me that the last people my teenage sons wanted to listen to were my husband and me. At times, my sons, yielding to peer pressures, have turned the parent volume down. I'm thankful for wise Church leaders who have counseled our sons. They never took over our role as parents. They listened but gave support to *our* guidance and redirected them back to us."

As families, we all have needs. Just a few heartfelt words about mothers who parent alone: Let me share with you the story of a mother of five whose husband was deployed overseas. She relates:

"When my husband left in early February, we had reliable vehicles.

However, by November, they had broken down, and we were not able to repair them. During this same time, my 17-year-old son let me know that he wasn't planning to serve a mission because he wasn't sure if the gospel was true. If ever there was a time in my life that I needed the blessings of the priesthood, it was then. I don't remember all the details or when and where, but I distinctly remember receiving more than one blessing from caring priesthood holders during that time. I always knew that I could call on my home teachers and they would be there. Neither one could fix my van, but they could give me much-needed priesthood blessings, and they found someone who could fix the car."

Devoted home teachers made a difference for this family, and they can make a difference for all single-parent families as they come to know them, gain their trust, and provide priesthood blessings. Bishops, high priests group leaders, and elders quorum presidents, these mothers need the blessings of the priesthood in their home, as do our remarkable single sisters.

President Hinckley warned about the "slow stain of the world" 10 years ago when the proclamation was issued. This prophetic declaration reaffirms the Lord's "standards, doctrines, and practices relative to the family."³ In contrast, the world tries to dictate the roles of women and motherhood. Women today are told they need a



Leaders support parents by honoring them, not by stepping in front to take over a child.

thriving career, organizations to belong to, and, if they have resources, children. The honored role of mother is increasingly out of fashion. Let me make it clear: we must not allow the world to compromise what we know is given to us by divine design.

Sisters, let me speak directly to you for just a few minutes. As members of the Relief Society of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, it is our blessing and our responsibility to nurture and sustain the family unit. Everyone belongs to a family, and every family needs to be strengthened and protected.

My greatest help in becoming a homemaker came first from my own mother and grandmother and next from the Relief Society sisters in the different wards where we have lived. I learned skills; I saw modeled the joys that come from creating a home where others want to be. Effective January 2006, there were new guidelines for home, family, and personal enrichment meetings and activities.

They provide increased flexibility in order for all sisters to participate in Relief Society. Now, Relief Society leaders, make sure that the meetings and the activities you plan will strengthen the homes of all your sisters.

Visiting teaching is another vehicle to support the family. I hope all of you have opportunity to be visiting teachers. Visiting teachers not only strengthen a sister spiritually but are also in a unique position to nurture and to assess needs. Relief Society leaders, be proactive in your welfare committee meetings, and report on spiritual and temporal needs identified by your visiting teachers.

The Pure Love of Christ

For those of you who are married, think back. What made you fall in love with your spouse? Remembering this can give you a forgiving heart. Express your love to each other. A wife can make a difference in her husband's life as she builds his self-confidence. A husband can brighten even the

darkest day with three simple words: "I love you." One of the greatest gifts parents can give their children is to show them they love each other.

Our role as parents in rearing righteous children is to provide, protect, and nurture, and we do that as equal partners. We do the same as leaders. Being a leader is hard work. Being a parent is hard work. We get discouraged, but we just keep going. I think we learn so much about the pure love of Christ in our families and through Church service.

As parents and leaders, we need to give to our children the love our Heavenly Father extends to us. In Moroni 8:17 we read, "I am filled with charity, which is everlasting love." Add to this the Lord's words: "Clothe yourselves with the bond of charity, as with a mantle, which is the bond of perfectness and peace" (D&C 88:125). I invite you, in all of your dealings, to put on the mantle of charity, to envelop your family in the pure love of Christ.

As families and leaders, may the Lord bless you to encircle those you love with the mantle of charity, that all of us may return to the presence of our Father in Heaven and live with Him together forever. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. See Gordon B. Hinckley, "Rejoicing in the Privilege to Serve," *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, June 21, 2003, 22.
2. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Liabona*, Oct. 2004, 49; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
3. "Stand Strong against the Wiles of the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 100.

Heavenly Homes, Forever Families

PRESIDENT THOMAS S. MONSON
First Counselor in the First Presidency



Building an Eternal Home

It is in a spirit of humility that I represent the First Presidency as the concluding speaker for this meeting. We have been inspired and edified by the remarks of Elder Bednar, Elder Perry, and Sister Parkin. Our thoughts have centered on home and family as we have been reminded that “the home is the basis of a righteous life, and no other instrumentality can take its place or fulfill its essential functions.”¹

A home is much more than a house built of lumber, brick, or stone. A home is made of love, sacrifice,

and respect. We are responsible for the homes we build. We must build wisely, for eternity is not a short voyage. There will be calm and wind, sunlight and shadows, joy and sorrow. But if we really try, our home can be a bit of heaven here on earth. The thoughts we think, the deeds we do, the lives we live not only influence the success of our earthly journey, they also mark the way to our eternal goals.

Some Latter-day Saint families are comprised of mother, father, and children, all at home, while others have witnessed the tender departure of one, then another, then another of their members. Sometimes a single individual comprises a family. Whatever its composition, the family continues—for families can be forever.

We can learn from the master architect—even the Lord. He has taught us how we must build. He declared, “Every . . . house divided against itself shall not stand” (Matthew 12:25). Later He cautioned, “Behold, mine house is a house of order . . . and not a house of confusion” (D&C 132:8).

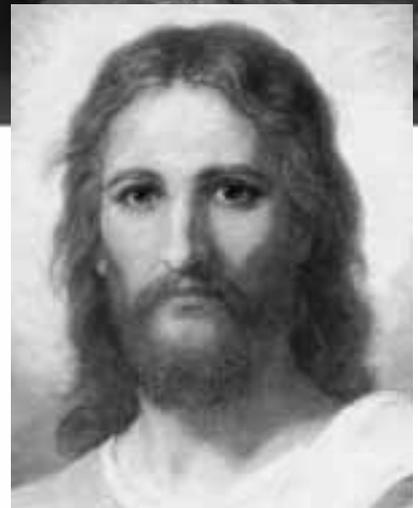
In a revelation given through the Prophet Joseph Smith at Kirtland, Ohio, December 27, 1832, the Master counseled, “Organize yourselves; prepare every needful thing; and establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God” (D&C 88:119; see also 109:8).

Where could any of us locate a more suitable blueprint whereby he could wisely and properly build? Such a house would meet the building code outlined in Matthew, even a house built “upon a rock” (Matthew 7:24, 25; see also Luke 6:48; 3 Nephi 14:24, 25), a house capable of withstanding the rains of adversity, the floods of opposition, and the winds of doubt everywhere present in our changing and challenging world.

Some might question, “But that revelation was to provide guidance for the construction of a temple. Is it relevant today?”

I would respond, “Did not the Apostle Paul declare, ‘Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?’” (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Let the Lord be the general contractor for our building project. Then each of us can be subcontractors responsible for a vital segment of the whole project. All of us are thereby builders. In addition to building our own homes, we also have the



The Master counseled, “Organize yourselves; prepare every needful thing; and establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith.”

responsibility to help build the kingdom of God here upon the earth by serving faithfully and effectively in our Church callings. May I provide guidelines from God, lessons from life, and points to ponder as we commence to build.

Kneel Down to Pray

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:5–6). So spoke the wise Solomon, son of David, king of Israel.

On this, the American continent, Jacob, the brother of Nephi, declared, “Look unto God with firmness of mind, and pray unto him with exceeding faith” (Jacob 3:1).

This divinely inspired counsel comes to us today as crystal-clear water to a parched earth. We live in troubled times.

Just a few short generations ago, one could not have imagined the world in which we now live and the problems it presents. We are surrounded by immorality, pornography, violence, drugs, and a host of other ills which afflict modern-day society.

Ours is the challenge, even the responsibility, not only to keep ourselves “unspotted from the world” (James 1:27) but also to guide our children and others for whom we have responsibility safely through the stormy seas of sin surrounding all of us, that we might one day return to live with our Heavenly Father.

The training of our own families requires our presence, our time, our best efforts. To be effective in our training, we must be stalwart in our examples to our family members and available for private time with each member, as well as time for counseling and guidance.

We often feel overwhelmed by the task before us. However, help is ever

at hand. He who knows each of His children will answer our fervent and heartfelt prayer as we seek help in guiding them. Such prayer will solve more problems, alleviate more suffering, prevent more transgression, and bring about greater peace and contentment in the human soul than any other way.

Besides needing such guidance for our own families, we have been called to positions where we have responsibility for others. As a bishop or counselor, as a priesthood quorum leader or an auxiliary leader, you have the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others. There may be those who come from part-member or less-active families; some may have turned from their parents, disregarding their pleadings and counsel. We could well be the instrument in the Lord’s hands to make a difference in the life of one in such a situation. Without the guidance of our Heavenly Father, however, we cannot do all that we have been called to do. Such help comes through prayer.

A prominent American judge was asked what we, as citizens of the countries of the world, could do to reduce crime and disobedience to law and to bring peace and contentment into our lives and into our nations. He thoughtfully replied, “I would suggest a return to the old-fashioned practice of family prayer.”

As a people, aren’t we grateful that family prayer is not an out-of-date practice with us? There is real meaning behind the oft-quoted adage, “The family that prays together stays together.”

The Lord Himself directed that we have family prayer when He said, “Pray in your families unto the Father, always in my name, that your wives and your children may be blessed” (3 Nephi 18:21).

As parents, as teachers, and as leaders in any capacity, we cannot afford to attempt this potentially perilous journey through mortality without heavenly assistance to aid us in guiding those for whom we have responsibility.

As we offer unto God our family prayers and our personal prayers, let us do so with faith and trust in Him. Kneel down to pray.

Step Up to Serve

For our example, we turn to the life of the Lord. Like a glowing searchlight of goodness is the life of Jesus as He ministered among men. He brought strength to the limbs of the cripple, sight to the eyes of the blind, hearing to the ears of the deaf, and life to the body of the dead.

His parables preach power. With the good Samaritan, He taught, “Love thy neighbor” (see Luke 10:30–35). Through His kindness to the woman taken in adultery, He taught compassionate understanding (see John 8:3–11). In His parable of the talents,



He taught us to improve ourselves and to strive for perfection (see Matthew 25:14–30). Well could He have been preparing us for our role in building an eternal family.

Each of us—whether a priesthood leader or an officer in an auxiliary organization—has responsibility to his or her sacred call. We have been set apart for the work to which we have been called. In Doctrine and Covenants 107:99 the Lord said, “Wherefore, now let every man learn his duty, and to act in the office in which he is appointed, in all diligence.” As we help to bless and strengthen those for whom we have responsibility in our Church callings, we will in effect be blessing and strengthening their families. Thus, the service we perform in our families and in our Church callings can have eternal consequences.

Many years ago, as a bishop in a large and diverse ward of over a thousand members located in downtown Salt Lake City, I faced numerous challenges.

One Sunday afternoon I received a phone call from the proprietor of a drugstore located within our ward boundaries. He indicated that earlier that morning, a young boy had come into his store and had purchased an ice-cream sundae from the soda fountain. He had paid for the purchase with money he took from an envelope, and then when he left, he had forgotten the envelope. When the proprietor had a chance

to examine it, he found that it was a fast-offering envelope with the name and telephone number of our ward printed on it. As he described to me the boy who had been in his store, I immediately identified the individual—a young deacon from our ward who came from a less-active family.

My first reaction was one of shock and disappointment to think that any of our deacons would take fast-offering funds intended for those in need and would go to a store on a Sunday and buy a treat with the money. I determined to visit the boy that afternoon in order to teach him about the sacred funds of the Church and his duty as a deacon to gather and to protect those funds.

As I drove to the home, I offered a silent prayer for direction in what I should say to compose the situation. I arrived and knocked on the door. It was opened by the boy’s mother, and I was invited into the living room. Although the room was barely lighted, I could see how small and run-down it was. The few pieces of furniture were threadbare. The mother herself looked worn out.

My indignation at her son’s actions that morning disappeared from my thoughts as I realized that here was a family in real need. I felt impressed to ask the mother if there was any food in the house. Tearfully she admitted that there was none.

She told me that her husband had been out of work for some time and that they were in desperate need not only of food but also of money with which to pay the rent so that they wouldn’t be evicted from the tiny house.



The service we perform in our families and in our Church callings can have eternal consequences.

I never did bring up the matter of the fast-offering donations, for I realized that the boy had most likely been desperately hungry when he stopped at the drugstore. Rather, I immediately arranged for assistance for the family, that they might have food to eat and a roof over their heads. In addition, with the help of the priesthood leaders in the ward, we were able to arrange employment for the husband so that he could provide for his family in the future.

As priesthood and auxiliary leaders, we are entitled to the Lord’s assistance in magnifying our callings and fulfilling our responsibilities.

Seek His help, and when the inspiration comes to you, move on that inspiration concerning where to go, whom to see, what to say, and how to say it. We can think a thought to death, but only when we move upon the thought do we bless human lives.

May we be true shepherds of those for whom we have responsibility. John Milton wrote in his poem "Lycidas," "The hungry Sheep look up, and are not fed" (line 125). The Lord Himself said to Ezekiel the prophet, "Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that . . . feed not the flock" (Ezekiel 34:2-3).

Ours is the responsibility to care for the flock, for the precious sheep, these tender lambs, are everywhere to be found—at home in our own families, in the homes of our extended families, and waiting for us in our Church callings. Jesus is our Exemplar. Said He, "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep" (John 10:14). We have a shepherding responsibility. May we each step up to serve.

Reach Out to Rescue

On the journey along the pathway of life, there are casualties. Some depart from the road markers which lead to life eternal only to discover that the detour chosen ultimately leads to a dead end. Indifference, carelessness, selfishness, and sin all take their costly toll in human lives. There are those who, for unexplained reasons, march to the sound of a

different drummer, later to learn they have followed the Pied Piper of sorrow and suffering.

In 1995 the First Presidency took note of those who had strayed from the fold of Christ and issued a special statement entitled "An Invitation to Come Back." The message contained this appeal:

"To you who for any reason find yourselves outside the embrace of the Church, we say come back. We invite you to return and partake of the



happiness you once knew. You will find many with outstretched arms to welcome you, assist you, and give you comfort.

"The Church needs your strength, love, loyalty, and devotion. The course is fixed and certain by which a person may return to the full blessings of Church membership, and we stand ready to receive all who wish to do so."

Perhaps an oft-repeated scene will bring closer to home your personal opportunity to reach out to rescue. Let us look in on a family with a son

named Jack. Throughout Jack's early life, he and his father had many serious arguments. One day when he was 17, they had a particularly agitated one. Jack said to his father, "This is the straw that breaks the camel's back. I'm leaving home, and I will never return!" He went to his room and packed a bag. His mother begged him to stay, but he was too angry to listen. He left her crying in the doorway.

Leaving the yard, he was about to pass through the gate when he heard his father call to him, "Jack, I know that a large share of the blame for your leaving rests with me. For this I am truly sorry. I want you to know that if you should ever wish to return home, you'll always be welcome. And I'll try to be a better father to you. I want you to know that I love you, and I'll always love you."

Jack said nothing but went to the bus station and bought a ticket to a distant point. As he sat in the bus watching the miles go by, his thoughts turned to the words of his father. He began to realize how much courage, how much love had been required for his father to say what he had said. Dad had apologized. He had invited him back and had left the words ringing in the summer air, "I love you."

Jack knew that the next move was up to him. He realized the only way he could ever find peace with himself was



May we be true shepherds of those for whom we have responsibility.

to demonstrate to his father the same kind of maturity, goodness, and love that Dad had shown toward him. Jack got off the bus. He bought a return ticket and began the journey home.

He arrived shortly after midnight, entered the house, and turned on the light. There in the rocking chair sat his father, his head bowed. As he looked up and saw Jack, he arose from the chair; they rushed into each other's arms. Jack later said, "Those last years that I was home were among the happiest of my life."

Here was a father who, suppressing passion and bridle pride, reached out to rescue his son before he became one of that vast "lost battalion" resulting from fractured families and shattered homes. Love was the binding band, the healing balm; love so often felt, so seldom expressed.

From Mount Sinai there thunders in our ears, "Honour thy father and thy mother" (Exodus 20:12), and later, from that same God, the injunction, "Live together in love" (D&C 42:45).

Following the Lord's Blueprint

Kneel down to pray. Step up to serve. Reach out to rescue. Each is a vital page of God's blueprint to make a house a home and a home a heaven.

Balance is key to us in our sacred and solemn responsibilities in our own homes and in our Church callings. We must use wisdom, inspiration, and sound judgment as we care for our families and fulfill our Church callings, for each is vitally important. We cannot neglect our families; we must not neglect our Church callings.

Let us build with skill, take no shortcuts, and follow His blueprint. Then the Lord, even our building inspector, may say to us, as He said when He appeared to Solomon, a builder of another day, "I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually" (1 Kings 9:3). We will then have heavenly homes and forever families and will be able to help, to strengthen, and to bless other families as well.

I pray most humbly and sincerely that this blessing may come to each of us. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTE

1. First Presidency letter, Feb. 11, 1999; see *Liabona*, Dec. 1999, 1; or *Ensign*, June 1999, 80.

THE FAMILY

A PROCLAMATION TO THE WORLD

THE FIRST PRESIDENCY AND COUNCIL OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

WE, THE FIRST PRESIDENCY and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children.

ALL HUMAN BEINGS—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.

IN THE PREMORTAL REALM, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshiped God as their Eternal Father and accepted His plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize his or her divine destiny as an heir of eternal life. The divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God's commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. We further declare that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife.

WE DECLARE the means by which mortal life is created to be divinely appointed. We affirm the sanctity of life and of its importance in God's eternal plan.

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" (Psalms 127:3). 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, to observe the commandments of God and to 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 is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity. Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities. By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners. Disability, death, or other circumstances may necessitate individual adaptation. Extended families should lend support when needed.

WE WARN that individuals who violate covenants of chastity, who abuse spouse or offspring, or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God. Further, we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.

WE CALL UPON responsible citizens and officers of government everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society.

This proclamation was read by President Gordon B. Hinckley as part of his message at the General Relief Society Meeting held September 23, 1995, in Salt Lake City, Utah.

THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

