

Fathers and Sons: A Remarkable Relationship

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Fathers and sons can play a critical role in helping each other become the best that they can be.



It is a wonderful sight to see all of you fathers sitting shoulder to shoulder with your sons to listen to the teachings of the Lord and receive counsel from the General Authorities of the Church. It is always a joy to be united with men and young men of the priesthood, but there is something special about seeing fathers and sons here together. It is a visual reminder of two of the most powerful elements of our theology: priesthood and family. The priesthood is the divine power through which families are sealed together forever. Everything in the

restored gospel of Jesus Christ, including the ordinances of the holy temple, is focused on the possibilities of families becoming part of the eternal family of God.

Tonight I want to talk to you fathers and sons about how you talk to each other. There is no other relationship quite like that which can and should exist between a boy and his dad. It can be one of the most nurturing, joyful relationships in life, one that can have a profound impact on who boys become and also on who dads become. Now, I understand that some of you young men do not have fathers with whom you can have these kinds of conversations. And some of you men do not have sons or have lost your sons to accident or illness. But much of what I say tonight will apply to uncles and grandfathers and priesthood leaders and other mentors who sometimes fill the gaps for these significant father-son relationships.

You see, we're all on a journey. Dads are a little further down the road, but none of us has yet arrived at our final destination. We are all in the process of becoming who we will one day be. Fathers and sons can play a critical role in helping each other

become the best that they can be.

I know that father-son relationships are never perfect, but everything I am going to suggest to you tonight is possible if you will put in the effort to make it happen.

Young men, you are your father's pride and joy. In you they see a promising future and their hope for a better, improved version of themselves. Your accomplishments are a joy to them. Your worries and problems are their worries and problems.

Fathers, you are the primary model of manhood for your sons. You are their most meaningful mentor, and believe it or not, you are their hero in countless ways. Your words and your example are a great influence on them.

Tonight I want to give you young men *three* simple suggestions on how to take full advantage of your relationship with your dad. And then I want to give you fathers *three* suggestions about relating to and communicating with your sons.

To you Aaronic Priesthood holders, I believe that by doing these three simple things you can make your relationship with your father even better than it is right now.

First, trust your father. He is not perfect, but he loves you and would never do anything he didn't think was in your best interest. So talk to him. Share your thoughts and feelings, your dreams and your fears. The more he knows about your life, the better chance he has to understand your concerns and to give you good counsel. When you put your trust in your dad, he will feel the responsibility of that trust and try harder than ever to understand and to help. As your father, he is entitled to inspiration on your behalf. His advice to you will be the heartfelt expressions of someone who knows and loves you. Your dad wants more than anything for you to be happy and successful, so why would you not want to trust someone like that? Boys, trust your dad.



Second, take an interest in your father's life. Ask about his job, his interests, his goals. How did he decide to do the work that he does? What was he like when he was your age? How did he meet your mother? And as you learn more about him, you may find that his experiences help you to better understand why he responds the way that he does. Watch your dad. Watch how he treats your mother. Watch how he performs his Church callings. Watch how he interacts with other people. You will be surprised what you learn about him

just by watching him and listening to him. Think about what you don't know about him and find out. Your love, admiration, and understanding will increase by what you learn. Boys, be interested in your dad's life.

And *third*, ask your father for advice. Let's be honest: he is probably going to give you his advice whether you ask for it or not, but it just works so much better when you ask! Ask for his advice on Church activity, on classes, on friends, on school, on dating, on sports or other hobbies. Ask for his counsel on your Church

assignments, on preparing for your mission, on decisions or choices you have to make. Nothing shows respect for another person as much as asking for his advice, because what you are really saying when you ask for advice is, "I appreciate what you know and the experiences you have had, and I value your ideas and suggestions." Those are nice things for a father to hear from his son.

In my experience, fathers who are asked for advice try harder to give good, sound, useful counsel. By asking your father for advice, you not only receive the benefit of his input, but you also provide him with a little extra motivation to strive to be a better father and a better man. He will think more carefully about whatever it is that he advises, and he will work harder to "walk the talk." Young men, ask your dad for advice!

OK, fathers, now it's your turn. Let's talk about some things you can do to enhance your relationship with your sons. You will notice that there is some linkage between the three suggestions I am going to give you and the suggestions I just gave your sons. That isn't coincidental.

First, fathers, listen to your sons—really listen to them. Ask the right kind of questions, and listen to what your sons have to say each time you have a few minutes together. You need to know—not to guess but to know—what is going on in your son's life. Don't assume that you know how he feels just because you were young once. Your sons live in a very different world from the one in which you grew up. As they share with you what's going on, you will have to listen very carefully and without being judgmental in order to understand what they are thinking and experiencing.

Find your own best way to connect. Some fathers like to take their sons fishing or to a sporting event. Others like to go on a quiet drive or work side by side in the yard. Some

find their sons enjoy conversations at night just before going to bed. Do whatever works best for you. A one-on-one relationship should be a routine part of your stewardship with your sons. Every father needs at least one focused, quality conversation with his sons every month during which they talk about specific things such as school, friends, feelings, video games, text messaging, worthiness, faith, and testimony. Where or when this happens isn't nearly as important as the fact that it happens.

And oh, how fathers need to listen. Remember, conversation where you do 90 percent of the talking is not a conversation. Use the word "feel" as often as you comfortably can in your discussions with your sons. Ask: "How do you feel about what you're learning in that class?" "How do you feel about what your friend said?" "How do you feel about your priesthood and the Church?"

Don't think you have to try to fix everything or solve everything during these visits. Most of the time, the best thing you can do is just listen. Fathers who listen more than they talk find that their sons share more about what is really going on in their lives. Dads, listen to your sons.

Second, pray with and for your sons. Give them priesthood blessings. A son who is worried about a big exam or a special event will surely benefit from a father's priesthood blessing. Occasions like the start of a new school year, a birthday, or as he begins to date may be opportune times to call upon the Lord to bless your son. One-on-one prayer and the sharing of testimonies can draw you closer to each other as well as closer to the Lord.

I am mindful that many of you fathers suffer heartache over sons who have strayed and are being captured by the world, just as Alma and Mosiah worried about their sons. Continue to do all you can to maintain strong family relationships. Never



give up, even when fervent prayer in their behalf is all you can do. These precious sons of yours are your sons forever! Fathers, pray with and bless your sons.

Third, dare to have the "big talks" with your sons. You know what I mean: talks about drugs and drinking, about the dangers of today's media—the Internet, cyber technologies, and pornography—and about priesthood worthiness, respect for girls, and moral cleanliness. While these should not be the only subjects you talk about with your sons, please don't shy away from them. Your boys need your counsel, guidance, and input on these subjects. As you talk about these very important matters, you will find that the trust between you will flourish.

I am especially concerned that we communicate openly and clearly with

our sons about sexual matters. Your sons are growing up in a world that openly embraces and flaunts early, casual, and thoughtless promiscuity. Your sons simply cannot avoid the blatant sexual imagery, messages, and enticements that are all around them. Fathers and Church leaders need to have open and frequent discussions that teach and clarify how young men of the priesthood handle this issue. Be positive about how wonderful and beautiful physical intimacy can be when it happens within the bounds the Lord has set, including temple covenants and commitments of eternal marriage. Studies show that the biggest deterrent to casual sexual activity is a wholesome attitude that connects such personal relationships with genuine commitment and mature love. Fathers, if you have not

had this “big talk” with your sons, please do so, and do it soon.

Now, in closing, I want to talk to all of you returned missionaries. Everything that I have said tonight also applies to you. Trust your father. You can be closer to him now than ever before regardless of what your relationship was like before your mission. During the next few years, you will make the most important decisions of your life. Along with prayer to your Heavenly Father, advice from your earthly father can help you make those decisions concerning your education, career choice, and marriage. The most important decision you will make in this life is the decision to marry the right girl in the temple! While no one should rush this significant decision, all returned missionaries should be working on it. Be where you can meet the right kind of friends. And go on dates. Hanging out is not the way, nor is it enough! Courting seems to be a lost art. Rediscover it. It really works! Ask your fathers—they know! Do not drift to the ways of the world. Rather, maintain the dignity and the Spirit you enjoyed on your mission. The Church will need your leadership in the future.

And fathers, the three suggestions I made to you moments ago absolutely apply to your relationships with your returned missionary sons. Listen to them, and connect with them in regular, focused conversation. Talk with them in depth about their feelings and desires. Pray with them, and give them blessings as they face the important decisions in their future.

I’m grateful for my sons and my sons-in-law, who have taught me so much, and I pray now that our Heavenly Father will bless all of us as fathers and sons that we will honor our priesthood and that we will love one another by making relationships with each other one of the great, eternal priorities of our lives. I so pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■