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Courageous Parenting

What the world really needs is courageous parenting from mothers and fathers who are not afraid to speak up and take a stand.

I would like to speak today to the parents of teenagers. Your bright and energetic youth are the future of the Church, and for that reason they are a prime target of the adversary. Many of you faithful mothers and fathers are listening to conference today, praying for answers to help you guide your children through these important years. My oldest grandchildren have recently become teens, so the subject is near to my heart. There are no perfect parents and no easy answers, but there are principles of truth that we can rely on.

The Young Men and Young Women Mutual theme for 2010 was taken from the book of Joshua. It begins, “Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid” (Joshua 1:9). This phrase from the scriptures would be a good theme for parents as well. In these last days, what the world really needs is courageous parenting from mothers and fathers who are not afraid to speak up and take a stand.

Imagine for a moment that your daughter was sitting on the railroad tracks and you heard the train whistle blowing. Would you warn her to get off the tracks? Or would you hesitate, worried that she might think you were being overprotective? If she ignored

your warning, would you quickly move her to a safe place? Of course you would! Your love for your daughter would override all other considerations. You would value her life more than her temporary goodwill.

Challenges and temptations are coming at our teenagers with the speed and power of a freight train. As we are reminded in the family proclamation, parents are responsible for the protection of their children.¹ That means spiritually as well as physically.

In the Book of Mormon, we read about Alma the Younger counseling his wayward son. Corianton had made some serious mistakes while serving a mission among the Zoramites. Alma loved him enough to speak very directly to the problem. He expressed his deep disappointment that his son had been immoral and explained to him the serious consequences of sin.

I am inspired every time I read these courageous words from Alma: “And now the Spirit of the Lord doth say unto me: Command thy children to do good . . . ; therefore I command you, my son, in the fear of God, that ye refrain from your iniquities” (Alma 39:12). This early intervention by his father became a turning point for Corianton. He repented and served

faithfully thereafter (see Alma 42:31; 43:1–2).

Contrast Alma’s example with that of another father from the scriptures, Eli in the Old Testament. Eli served as the high priest in Israel during the childhood of Samuel the prophet. The scriptures explain that the Lord rebuked him severely “because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not” (1 Samuel 3:13). Eli’s sons never did repent, and all of Israel suffered because of their folly. The story of Eli teaches us that parents who love their children cannot afford to be intimidated by them.

Several years ago at general conference, Elder Joe J. Christensen reminded us that “parenting is not a popularity contest.”² In the same spirit, Elder Robert D. Hales has observed, “Sometimes we are afraid of our children—afraid to counsel with them for fear of offending them.”³

Years ago our 17-year-old son wanted to go on a weekend trip with his friends, who were all good boys. He asked for permission to go. I wanted to say yes, but for some reason I felt uncomfortable about the trip. I shared my feelings with my wife, who was very supportive. “We need to listen to that warning voice,” she said.

Of course, our son was disappointed and asked why we didn’t want him to go. I answered honestly that I didn’t know why. “I just don’t feel good about it,” I explained, “and I love you too much to ignore these feelings inside.” I was quite surprised when he said, “That’s OK, Dad. I understand.”

Young people understand more than we realize because they too have the gift of the Holy Ghost. They are trying to recognize the Spirit when He speaks, and they are watching our example. From us they learn to pay



attention to their promptings—that if they “don’t feel good about something,” it’s best not to pursue it.

It’s so important for husbands and wives to be united when making parenting decisions. If either parent doesn’t feel good about something, then permission should not be granted. If either feels uncomfortable about a movie, a television show, a video game, a party, a dress, a swimsuit, or an Internet activity, have the courage to support each other and say no.

I would like to share with you a letter from a heartbroken mother. Her teenage son gradually lost the Spirit and drifted away from Church activity. She explained how this happened: “All throughout my son’s teenage years, I worried and tried to stop him from playing violent video games. I talked to my husband and showed him articles in the *Ensign* and in the newspaper that cautioned about these games. But my husband felt it was OK. He said that our son wasn’t out using drugs and that I should stop worrying.

There were times that I would hide the controllers, and my husband would give them back. It began to be easier for me to give in . . . than to fight it. I really feel that gaming is just as addictive as drugs. I would do anything to prevent other parents from going through this experience.”

Brothers and sisters, if your spouse doesn’t feel good about something, show respect for those feelings. When you take the easy way out by saying and doing nothing, you may be enabling destructive behavior.

Parents can prevent a lot of heartache by teaching their children to postpone romantic relationships until the time comes when they are ready for marriage. Prematurely pairing off with a boyfriend or girlfriend is dangerous. Becoming a “couple” creates emotional intimacy, which too often leads to physical intimacy. Satan knows this sequence and uses it to his advantage. He will do whatever he can to keep young men from serving missions and to prevent temple marriages.

It is vital that parents have the courage to speak up and intervene before Satan succeeds. President Boyd K. Packer has taught that “when morality is involved, we have both the *right* and the *obligation* to raise a warning voice.”⁴

I have always believed that nothing really good happens late at night and that young people need to know what time they are expected to come home.

There is a great deal of wisdom displayed when parents stay up and wait for their children to return home. Young men and women make far better choices when they know their parents are waiting up to hear about their evening and to kiss them good night.

May I express my personal warning about a practice that is common in many cultures. I am referring to sleepovers, or spending the night at the home of a friend. As a bishop I discovered that too many youth violated the Word of Wisdom or the law of chastity for the first time as part



kneel together as a family. It takes courage to turn off the television and the computer and to guide your family through the pages of the scriptures every day. It takes courage to turn down other invitations on Monday night so that you can reserve that evening for your family. It takes courage and willpower to avoid overscheduling so that your family can be home for dinner.

One of the most effective ways we can influence our sons and daughters is to counsel with them in private interviews. By listening closely, we can discover the desires of their hearts, help them set righteous goals, and also share with them the spiritual impressions that we have received about them. Counseling requires courage.

Try to imagine what the rising generation could become if these five righteous patterns were practiced consistently in every home. Our young people could be like Helaman's army: invincible (see Alma 57:25–26).

Parenting teenagers in the latter days is a very humbling assignment. Satan and his followers are striving to bring this generation down; the Lord is counting on valiant parents to bring them up. Parents, “be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid” (Joshua 1:9). I know that God hears and will answer your prayers. I testify that the Lord supports and blesses courageous parents. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Liahona*, Oct. 2004, 49; *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
2. Joe J. Christensen, “Rearing Children in a Polluted Environment,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 11.
3. Robert D. Hales, “With All the Feeling of a Tender Parent: A Message of Hope to Families,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, May 2004, 90.
4. Boyd K. Packer, “Our Moral Environment,” *Ensign*, May 1992, 67.

of a sleepover. Too often their first exposure to pornography and even their first encounter with the police occurred when they were spending the night away from home.

Peer pressure becomes more powerful when our children are away from our influence and when their defenses are weakened late at night. If you have ever felt uneasy about an overnight activity, don't be afraid to respond to that warning voice inside. Always be prayerful when it comes to protecting your precious children.

Courageous parenting does not always involve saying no. Parents also need courage to say yes to the counsel of modern-day prophets. Our Church leaders have counseled us to establish righteous patterns in our homes. Consider five fundamental practices that have the power to fortify our youth: family prayer, family scripture study, family home evening, family dinner together, and regular one-on-one interviews with each child.

It takes courage to gather children from whatever they're doing and