

“CHILDREN ARE AN HERITAGE OF THE LORD”

LESSON 9

Purpose To remind participants that when earthly parents welcome Heavenly Father’s children into their homes, they assume responsibility to love them, cherish them, teach them, and lead them to eternal life.

Preparation

1. As you prepare yourself to teach, look for ways to follow the principles under “Your Responsibilities as a Teacher” (pages ix–xi in this manual).
2. Read the lesson’s bold headings. These headings give an overview of the doctrines and principles in the lesson. As part of your preparation, ponder ways to help participants apply these doctrines and principles. Seek the guidance of the Spirit in deciding what you should emphasize to meet participants’ needs.
3. In advance, ask a few Primary children to come to the class at the beginning of the lesson and sing “I Am a Child of God” (*Children’s Songbook*, 2–3; *Hymns*, no. 301). Or be prepared to sing the song with participants.
4. In advance, invite one or two participants to prepare to talk briefly about the joy their children bring into their lives. Suggest that they share personal experiences as part of their presentations. Seek the guidance of the Spirit as you decide whom you should ask to fulfill this assignment.

Suggested Lesson Development

Heavenly Father entrusts His spirit children to earthly parents.

Ask the assigned Primary children to sing “I Am a Child of God” (see “Preparation,” item 3). Allow the children to return to their Primary classes immediately after the song. If you have not asked Primary children to come to the class, invite participants to sing the song with you.

- What truths are taught in this song?
- What can we learn from this song about the responsibilities of parents? (Consider referring to the words in the chorus: “Lead me, guide me, walk beside me, / Help me find the way. / Teach me all that I must do / To live with him someday.”)

President Gordon B. Hinckley, the 15th President of the Church, counseled: “Never forget that these little ones are the sons and daughters of God and that yours is a custodial relationship to them, that He was a parent before you were parents and that He has not relinquished His parental rights or interest in these His little ones. Now, love them, take care of them. Fathers, control your tempers, now and in all the years to come. Mothers, control your voices; keep them down. Rear your children in love, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Take care of your little ones. Welcome them into your homes, and nurture and love them with all of your hearts” (“Excerpts from Recent Addresses of President Gordon B. Hinckley,” *Ensign*, July 1997, 73).

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught: “Every human being is a spirit child of God and lived with Heavenly Father before coming to earth. He entrusts his spirit children to earthly parents, who provide a mortal body for them through the miracle of physical birth, and gives to parents the sacred opportunity and responsibility to love, protect, teach, and to bring them up in light and truth so they may one day, through the atonement and resurrection of Jesus Christ, return to our Father’s presence” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1991, 104; or *Ensign*, May 1991, 78).

- How should this knowledge and understanding affect the way parents treat their children?

Read the following counsel, given by Bishop Robert D. Hales while he was serving as Presiding Bishop: “In many ways earthly parents represent their Heavenly Father in the process of nurturing, loving, caring [for], and teaching children. Children naturally look to their parents to learn of the characteristics of their Heavenly Father. After they come to love, respect, and have confidence in their earthly parents, they often unknowingly develop the same feelings toward their Heavenly Father” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1993, 10; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 9).

Invite participants to ponder how parents’ attitudes and actions can influence children’s feelings toward Heavenly Father.

Parents should seek to meet each child’s individual needs.

Explain that each child has his or her own desires, talents, and needs. It is important for parents to strive to understand the individual capacities and needs of each child.

Many children are quite different from their parents. Their temperaments may be different, and they may have different strengths and weaknesses. These differences can be frustrating for parents, who may find it difficult to guide and help children through experiences they never had themselves. But parents should remember that Heavenly Father has entrusted these particular children to them and that He will help them know how to guide each child toward the fulfillment of his or her divine potential. Sister Michaelene P. Grassli, former general president of the Primary, said:

“We need to discover who our children really are. We need to know what interests them, what worries them, and what they would do if they had their fondest dreams come true. Nearly always, their fondest dreams are wonderful. We can let children be their own selves and not expect them to be reproductions of their parents. Give them varied experiences so they can *discover* what interests them, and then encourage these interests and talents—even if they are not the same as yours” (“Teaching Our Children,” *Ensign*, Apr. 1994, 62).

- Why is it important that parents understand the individual characteristics and needs of each of their children?
- What harm can come when parents force children into activities or experiences that are inconsistent with the children’s individual talents and interests?
- What can parents do to nurture the talents and abilities of each of their children?

To help participants apply this principle, ask them to list some ways in which children in the same family might differ from one another and from their

parents. In doing so, participants may draw on their experiences as parents or their experiences with their own parents and siblings. Write their ideas on the chalkboard. Then discuss specific talents or characteristics in the list. Refer to specific talents or characteristics by asking questions such as the following:

- What could parents do to encourage a child to continue developing this talent?
- If a child has this characteristic, what might parents do to teach him or her to be loving and kind?
- In what ways could a child with this talent contribute to family home evening?

Point out that parents who understand the abilities and characteristics of each child are better able to discipline their children. Invite a participant to read the following counsel, given by Elder James E. Faust while he was serving in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (page 49 in the *Marriage and Family Relations Participant's Study Guide*):

"One of the most difficult parental challenges is to appropriately discipline children. Child rearing is so individualistic. Every child is different and unique. What works with one may not work with another. I do not know who is wise enough to say what discipline is too harsh or what is too lenient except the parents of the children themselves, who love them most. It is a matter of prayerful discernment for the parents. Certainly the overarching and undergirding principle is that the discipline of children must be motivated more by love than by punishment" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1990, 41; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1990, 34).

- What experiences have helped you understand that discipline must be given according to each child's needs and circumstances?

Children are entitled to a loving relationship with their parents.

Point out that one of the most important things parents can do is to provide an atmosphere of love, friendship, and happiness in their home. Share the following statements:

While serving in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Elder Gordon B. Hinckley said: "How fortunate, how blessed is the child who feels the affection of his parents. That warmth, that love will bear sweet fruit in the years that follow" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1978, 25; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1978, 18).

Elder Marlin K. Jensen of the Seventy said: "Like so much of what is worthwhile in life, our needs for friendship are often best met in the home. If our children feel friendship within the family, with each other, and with parents, they will not be desperate for acceptance outside the family" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1999, 81; or *Ensign*, May 1999, 64).

- What do you recall from your childhood that helped you feel loved? In what ways have these feelings of love influenced you throughout your life?
- What can parents do in their homes to help their children know that they love them?

Point out that as parents strive to have a loving relationship with their children, good communication is vital. Elder M. Russell Ballard counseled: "Nothing is more important to the relationship between family members than open, honest

communication. This is particularly true for parents trying to teach gospel principles and standards to their children. The ability to counsel with our youth—and perhaps more importantly, to really listen to their concerns—is the foundation upon which successful relationships are built. Often what we see in the eyes and what we feel in the heart will communicate far more than what we hear or say” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1999, 114; or *Ensign*, May 1999, 86–87).

- What can parents do to communicate well with their children? (Answers may include those in the following list.)
 - a. Be a tireless listener. As necessary, repeat what you understand from what the children say. This will show them that you really are listening and will help you be sure that you understand.
 - b. Spend time talking with and listening to children even when they are very young—even before they are able to talk.
 - c. Be interested in their ideas.
 - d. Generate conversations during mealtimes.
 - e. Spend time talking with them one-on-one.

To emphasize that parents should spend time alone with each of their children, share the following counsel from Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: “Spend individual time with [your] children, letting them choose the activity and the subject of conversation. Block out distractions” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1999, 41; or *Ensign*, May 1999, 33).

For more ideas on principles of good communication, see pages 24–26 in lesson 5.

Child abuse is an offense to God.

Read Matthew 18:6 with participants. Explain that parents should never abuse their children in any way.

- What are some forms of child abuse? (Consider listing participants’ responses on the chalkboard. Answers may include those in the following list.)
 - a. Violent anger
 - b. Yelling
 - c. Threats
 - d. Physical assault
 - e. Any sexual contact or inappropriate touching
 - f. Belittling comments
 - g. Withholding affection
 - h. Exposure to inappropriate movies, jokes, language, magazines, or Internet material
 - i. Improper exposure to the elements
 - j. Neglect, including lack of medical care and insufficient supervision or discipline
- In what ways do these actions harm children?

After discussing this question, explain that sometimes adults who were mistreated during childhood treat children in the same negative ways, not realizing how harmful the behavior is. Sometimes they may feel unable to change their behavior on their own. Emphasize that people who have been abusive can change their behavior as they humbly seek the Lord’s help and guidance.

Those who want help in understanding and changing their abusive behavior may turn to their bishop. He will be able to counsel them. He may also recommend counselors in LDS Family Services or community resources that provide help that is consistent with Church standards.

Read Doctrine and Covenants 121:41–44 with participants.

- In what ways does this passage relate to the way parents discipline their children?

While serving as First Counselor in the First Presidency, President Gordon B. Hinckley taught:

"Children don't need beating. They need love and encouragement. They need fathers to whom they can look with respect rather than fear. Above all, they need example. . . .

"My plea . . . is a plea to save the children. Too many of them walk with pain and fear, in loneliness and despair. Children need sunlight. They need happiness. They need love and nurture. They need kindness and refreshment and affection. Every home, regardless of the cost of the house, can provide an environment of love which will be an environment of salvation" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1994, 74–75; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 54).

President Brigham Young, the second President of the Church, taught:

"Bring up your children in the love and fear of the Lord; study their dispositions and their temperaments, and deal with them accordingly, never allowing yourself to correct them in the heat of passion; teach them to love you rather than to fear you" (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe [1954], 207).

Children bring great joy into their parents' lives.

Point out that it is important that parents remember their sacred and solemn responsibilities, but it is also important that they reflect on the joy their children bring into their lives. While serving in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Elder James E. Faust observed that "while few human challenges are greater than that of being good parents, few opportunities offer greater potential for joy" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1990, 40; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1990, 32; see also page 48 in the *Marriage and Family Relations Participant's Study Guide*).

Invite the assigned participants to talk briefly about the joy their children bring into their lives (see "Preparation," item 4). As time permits, consider sharing your feelings about the joy children have brought into your life.

Conclusion

Emphasize that children are gifts from our Heavenly Father. As the Psalmist said, "Children are an heritage of the Lord" (Psalm 127:3). When earthly parents welcome Heavenly Father's children into their homes, they assume responsibility to love them, cherish them, teach them, and lead them to eternal life.

Refer to pages 35–38 in the *Marriage and Family Relations Participant's Study Guide*. Encourage participants to review the doctrines and principles in this lesson by (1) following at least one of the suggestions in "Ideas for Application"

and (2) reading the article “Precious Children, a Gift from God,” by President Thomas S. Monson. Point out that married couples can receive great benefits from reading and discussing the articles in the study guide together.

Encourage participants to bring their study guides to class for the next lesson.

Additional**Resource Material****Statements to address the needs of those who are not in traditional family situations**

To address the circumstances of participants who are not in traditional family situations, read one or more of the following statements:

Elder Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained: “Any souls who by nature or circumstance are not afforded the blessing of marriage and parenthood, or who innocently must act alone in rearing children and working to support them, will not be denied in the eternities any blessing—provided they keep the commandments. As President Lorenzo Snow [the 5th President of the Church] promised, ‘That is sure and positive’ ” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1993, 30; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 23).

President Harold B. Lee, the 11th President of the Church, said: “[Women] who have been denied the blessings of wifeness or motherhood in this life—who say in their heart, if I could have done, I would have done, or I would give if I had, but I cannot for I have not—the Lord will bless you as though you had done, and the world to come will compensate for those who desire in their hearts the righteous things that they were not able to do because of no fault of their own” (“Maintain Your Place As a Woman,” *Ensign*, Feb. 1972, 56).

Elder Gene R. Cook of the Seventy explained: “Sometimes a family has just one parent because of death or divorce. Sometimes only one parent is a member of the Church. Sometimes one is less active than the other. Just the same, one spiritually motivated parent can successfully raise up a family to the Lord. Some of the best men and women I have known have come from such families. May the Lord always bless those good mothers and fathers who may think they have to do it ‘on their own’ but actually bring up their children under the direction of the Lord” (*Raising Up a Family to the Lord* [1993], xv).