

THE SACRED ROLES OF FATHERS AND MOTHERS

PART 2: MOTHERS' ROLES

IDEAS FOR APPLICATION

According to your own needs and circumstances, follow one or both of these suggestions.

- In the proclamation on the family, we are counseled that “fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners” (see page iv in this study guide). With your spouse, review President Ezra Taft Benson’s 10 suggestions for fathers, on pages 41–42 in this study guide, and his 10 suggestions for mothers, on pages 45–47. Discuss ways you can work together and support one another in these responsibilities.
- Write a letter to your mother or to a grandmother.

READING ASSIGNMENT

Study the following articles. If you are married, read and discuss the articles with your spouse.

“BECAUSE SHE IS A MOTHER”

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Tribute to Mothers

There are some lines attributed to Victor Hugo which read:

“She broke the bread into two fragments and gave them to her children, who ate with eagerness. ‘She hath kept none for herself,’ grumbled the sergeant.

“‘Because she is not hungry,’ said a soldier.

“‘No,’ said the sergeant, ‘because she is a mother.’”

In a year when we are celebrating the faith and valor of those who made that exacting trek across Iowa, Nebraska, and Wyoming, I wish to pay tribute to the modern counterparts of those pioneer mothers who watched after, prayed for, and far too often buried their babies on that long trail. To the women within the sound of my voice who dearly want to be mothers and are not, I say through your tears and ours on that subject, God will yet, in days that lie somewhere ahead, bring “hope to [the] desolate heart.”¹ As prophets have repeatedly taught from this pulpit, ultimately “no blessing shall be withheld” from the faithful, even if those blessings do not come immediately.² In the meantime we rejoice that the call to nurture is not limited to our own flesh and blood.

In speaking of mothers I do not neglect the crucial, urgent role of fathers, particularly as fatherlessness in contemporary homes is considered by some to be “the central social problem of our time.”³ Indeed, fatherlessness can be a problem even in a

home where the father is present—eating and sleeping, so to speak, “by remote.” But that is a priesthood message for another day. Today I wish to praise those motherly hands that have rocked the infant’s cradle and, through the righteousness taught to their children there, are at the very center of the Lord’s purposes for us in mortality.

In so speaking I echo Paul, who wrote in praise of Timothy’s “unfeigned faith . . . , which dwelt first,” he said, “in thy grandmother Lois, and [in] thy mother Eunice.”⁴ “From [the days when thou wert] a child,” Paul said, “thou hast known the holy scriptures.”⁵ We give thanks for all the mothers and grandmothers from whom such truths have been learned at such early ages.

Sacrifices Made by Young Mothers

In speaking of mothers generally, I especially wish to praise and encourage *young* mothers. The work of a mother is hard, too often unheralded work. The young years are often those when either husband or wife—or both—may still be in school or in those earliest and leanest stages of developing the husband’s breadwinning capacities. Finances fluctuate daily between low and nonexistent. The apartment is usually decorated in one of two smart designs—Deseret Industries provincial or early Mother Hubbard. The car, if there is one, runs on smooth tires and an empty tank. But with night feedings and night teething, often the greatest challenge of all for a young mother is simply fatigue. Through these years, mothers go longer on less sleep and give more to others with less personal renewal for themselves than any other group I know at any other time in life. It is not surprising when the shadows

under their eyes sometimes vaguely resemble the state of Rhode Island.

Of course the irony is that this is often the sister we want to call—or need to call—to service in the ward and stake auxiliaries. That’s understandable. Who wouldn’t want the exemplary influence of these young Loises- and Eunices-in-the-making? Everyone, be wise. Remember that families are the highest priority of all, especially in those formative years. Even so, young mothers will still find magnificent ways to serve faithfully in the Church, even as others serve and strengthen them and their families in like manner.

Do the best you can through these years, but whatever else you do, cherish that role that is so uniquely yours and for which heaven itself sends angels to watch over you and your little ones. Husbands—especially husbands—as well as Church leaders and friends in every direction, be helpful and sensitive and wise. Remember, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.”⁶

Mothers, we acknowledge and esteem your faith in every footstep. Please know that it is worth it then, now, and forever. And if, for whatever reason, you are making this courageous effort alone, without your husband at your side, then our prayers will be all the greater for you, and our determination to lend a helping hand even more resolute.

Mothers Do God’s Work

One young mother wrote to me recently that her anxiety tended to come on three fronts. One was that whenever she heard talks on LDS motherhood, she worried because she felt she didn’t measure up or somehow wasn’t going to be equal to the task. Second, she felt like the world expected her to teach her children reading, writing, interior design, Latin, calculus, and the Internet—all before the baby said something terribly ordinary, like “goo goo.” Third, she often felt people were sometimes patronizing, almost always without meaning to be, because the advice she got or even the compliments she received seemed to reflect nothing of the mental investment, the spiritual and emotional exertion, the long-night, long-day, stretched-to-the-limit demands that sometimes are required in trying to be and wanting to be the mother God hopes she will be.

But one thing, she said, keeps her going: “Through the thick and the thin of this, and through the occasional tears of it all, *I know deep down inside I am doing God’s work.* I know that in my motherhood I am in an eternal partnership with Him. I am deeply moved that God finds His ultimate purpose and meaning in being a parent, even if some of His children make Him weep.

“It is this realization,” she says, “that I try to recall on those inevitably difficult days when all of this can be a bit overwhelming. Maybe it is precisely our inability and anxiousness that urge us to reach out to Him and enhance His ability to reach back to us. Maybe He secretly hopes we *will* be anxious,” she said, “and *will* plead for His help. Then, I believe, He can teach these children directly, through us, but with no resistance offered. I like that idea,” she concludes. “It gives me hope. If I can be right before my Father in Heaven, perhaps His guidance to our children can be unimpeded. Maybe then it can be *His* work and *His* glory in a very literal sense.”⁷

Your Children Will Call You Blessed

In light of that kind of expression, it is clear that some of those Rhode Island-sized shadows come not just from diapers and carpooling but from at least a few sleepless nights spent searching the soul, seeking earnestly for the capacity to raise these children to be what God wants them to be. Moved by that kind of devotion and determination, may I say to mothers collectively, in the name of the Lord, you are magnificent. You are doing terrifically well. The very fact that you have been given such a responsibility is everlasting evidence of the trust your Father in Heaven has in you. He knows that your giving birth to a child does not immediately propel you into the circle of the omniscient. If you and your husband will strive to love God and live the gospel yourselves; if you will plead for that guidance and comfort of the Holy Spirit promised to the faithful; if you will go to the temple to both make and claim the promises of the most sacred covenants a woman or man can make in this world; if you will show others, including your children, the same caring, compassionate, forgiving heart you want heaven to show you; if you try your best to be the best parent you can be, you will have done all that a human being can do and all that God expects you to do.

Sometimes the decision of a child or a grandchild will break your heart. Sometimes expectations won’t immediately be met. Every mother and father worries about that. Even that beloved and wonderfully successful parent President Joseph F. Smith pled, “Oh! God, let me not lose my own.”⁸ That is every parent’s cry, and in it is something of every parent’s fear. But no one has failed who keeps trying and keeps praying. You have every right to receive encouragement and to know in the end your children will call your name blessed, just like those generations of foremothers before you who hoped your same hopes and felt your same fears.

Yours is the grand tradition of Eve, the mother of all the human family, the one who understood that she and Adam *had* to fall in order that “men [and

women] might be”⁹ and that there would be joy. Yours is the grand tradition of Sarah and Rebekah and Rachel, without whom there could not have been those magnificent patriarchal promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob which bless us all. Yours is the grand tradition of Lois and Eunice and the mothers of the 2,000 stripling warriors. Yours is the grand tradition of Mary, chosen and foreordained from before this world was, to conceive, carry, and bear the Son of God Himself. We thank all of you, including our own mothers, and tell you there is nothing more important in this world than participating so directly in the work and glory of God, in bringing to pass the mortality and earthly life of His daughters and sons, so that immortality and eternal life can come in those celestial realms on high.

Rely on the Savior Forever

When you have come to the Lord in meekness and lowliness of heart and, as one mother said, “pounded on the doors of heaven to ask for, to plead for, to demand guidance and wisdom and help for this wondrous task,” that door is thrown open to provide you the influence and the help of all eternity. Claim the promises of the Savior for the world. Ask for the healing balm of the Atonement for whatever may be troubling you or your children. Know that in faith things will be made right in spite of you or, more correctly, because of you.

You can’t possibly do this alone, but you *do* have help. The Master of Heaven and Earth is there to

bless you—He who resolutely goes after the lost sheep, sweeps thoroughly to find the lost coin, waits everlastingly for the return of the prodigal son. Yours is the work of salvation, and therefore you will be magnified, compensated, made more than you are and better than you have ever been as you try to make honest effort, however feeble you may sometimes feel that to be.

Remember, remember all the days of your motherhood: “Ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save.”¹⁰

Rely on Him. Rely on Him heavily. Rely on Him forever. And “press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope.”¹¹ You are doing God’s work. You are doing it wonderfully well. He is blessing you and He will bless you, even—no, *especially*—when your days and your nights may be the most challenging. Like the woman who anonymously, meekly, perhaps even with hesitation and some embarrassment, fought her way through the crowd just to touch the hem of the Master’s garment, so Christ will say to the women who worry and wonder and sometimes weep over their responsibility as mothers, “Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole.”¹² And it will make your children whole as well.

From an address by Elder Holland in the April 1997 general conference of the Church (see Conference Report, Apr. 1997, 46–49; or *Ensign*, May 1997, 35–37).

NOTES

1. “Redeemer of Israel,” *Hymns*, no. 6; see also 3 Nephi 22:1.
2. See Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (1954–56), 2:76; Harold B. Lee, *Ye Are the Light of the World: Selected Sermons and Writings of President Harold B. Lee* (1974), 292; and Gordon B. Hinckley, in Conference Report, Apr. 1991, 94.
3. Tom Lowe, “Fatherlessness: The Central Social Problem of Our Time,” Claremont Institute Home Page Editorial, Jan. 1996.
4. 2 Timothy 1:5.
5. 2 Timothy 3:15.
6. Ecclesiastes 3:1.
7. Personal correspondence.
8. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (1939), 462.
9. 2 Nephi 2:25.
10. 2 Nephi 31:19.
11. 2 Nephi 31:20.
12. Matthew 9:22.

TO THE MOTHERS IN ZION

President Ezra Taft Benson
13th President of the Church

Mothers in Zion, your God-given roles are so vital to your own exaltation and to the salvation and exaltation of your family. A child needs a mother more than all the things money can buy. Spending time with your children is the greatest gift of all.

With love in my heart for the mothers in Zion, I would now like to suggest ten specific ways our mothers may spend effective time with their children.

Be at the Crossroads. First, take time to always be at the crossroads when your children are either coming or going—when they leave and return from school, when they leave and return from dates, when they bring friends home. Be there at the

crossroads whether your children are six or sixteen. In Proverbs we read, “A child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame” (Proverbs 29:15). Among the greatest concerns in our society are the millions of latchkey children who come home daily to empty houses, unsupervised by working parents.

Be a Real Friend. Second, mothers, take time to be a real friend to your children. Listen to your children, really listen. Talk with them, laugh and joke with them, sing with them, play with them, cry with them, hug them, honestly praise them. Yes, regularly spend unrushed one-on-one time with each child. Be a real friend to your children.

Read to Your Children. Third, mothers, take time to read to your children. Starting from the cradle, read to your sons and daughters. Remember what the poet said:

You may have tangible wealth untold;
Caskets of jewels and coffers of gold.
Richer than I you can never be—
I had a mother who read to me.
(Strickland Gillilan, “The Reading Mother.”)

You will plant a love for good literature and a real love for the scriptures if you will read to your children regularly.

Pray with Your Children. Fourth, take time to pray with your children. Family prayers, under the direction of the father, should be held morning and night. Have your children feel of your faith as you call down the blessings of heaven upon them. Paraphrasing the words of James, “The . . . fervent prayer of a righteous [mother] availeth much” (James 5:16). Have your children participate in family and personal prayers, and rejoice in their sweet utterances to their Father in Heaven.

Have Weekly Home Evenings. Fifth, take time to have a meaningful weekly home evening. With your husband presiding, participate in a spiritual and an uplifting home evening each week. Have your children actively involved. Teach them correct principles. Make this one of your great family traditions. Remember the marvelous promise made by President Joseph F. Smith when home evenings were first introduced to the Church: “If the Saints obey this counsel, we promise that great blessings will result. Love at home and obedience to parents will increase. Faith will be developed in the hearts of the youth of Israel, and they will gain power to combat the evil influence and temptations which beset them” (in James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. [1965–75], 4:339). This wonderful promise is still in effect today.

Be Together at Mealtimes. Sixth, take time to be together at mealtimes as often as possible. This is a challenge as the children get older and lives get busier. But happy conversation, sharing of the day’s plans and activities, and special teaching moments occur at mealtime because mothers and fathers and children work at it.

Read Scriptures Daily. Seventh, take time daily to read the scriptures together as a family. Individual scripture reading is important, but family scripture reading is vital. Reading the Book of Mormon together as a family will especially bring increased spirituality into your home and will give both parents and children the power to resist temptation and to have the Holy Ghost as their constant companion. I promise you that the Book of Mormon will change the lives of your family.

Do Things as a Family. Eighth, take time to do things together as a family. Make family outings and picnics and birthday celebrations and trips special times and memory builders. Whenever possible, attend, as a family, events where one of the family members is involved, such as a school play, a ball game, a talk, a recital. Attend church meetings together and sit together as a family when you can. Mothers who help families pray and play together will stay together and will bless children’s lives forever.

Teach Your Children. Ninth, mothers, take time to teach your children. Catch the teaching moments. This can be done anytime during the day—at mealtime, in casual settings, or at special sit-down times together, at the foot of the bed at the end of the day, or during an early morning walk together. Mothers, you are your children’s best teacher. Don’t shift this precious responsibility to day-care centers or baby-sitters. A mother’s love and prayerful concern for her children are her most important ingredients in teaching her own.

Teach children gospel principles. Teach them it pays to be good. Teach them there is no safety in sin. Teach them a love for the gospel of Jesus Christ and a testimony of its divinity.

Teach your sons and daughters modesty, and teach them to respect manhood and womanhood. Teach your children sexual purity, proper dating standards, temple marriage, missionary service, and the importance of accepting and magnifying Church callings.

Teach them a love for work and the value of a good education.

Teach them the importance of the right kind of entertainment, including appropriate movies and

videos and music and books and magazines. Discuss the evils of pornography and drugs, and teach them the value of living the clean life.

Yes, mothers, teach your children the gospel in your own home, at your own fireside. This is the most effective teaching that your children will ever receive. This is the Lord's way of teaching. The Church cannot teach like you can. The school cannot. The day-care center cannot. But you can, and the Lord will sustain you. Your children will remember your teachings forever, and when they are old, they will not depart from them. They will call you blessed—their truly angel mother.

Mothers, this kind of heavenly, motherly teaching takes time—lots of time. It cannot be done effectively part-time. It must be done all the time in order to save and exalt your children. This is your divine calling.

Truly Love Your Children. Tenth and finally, mothers, take the time to truly love your children. A mother's unqualified love approaches Christlike love.

Here is a beautiful tribute by a son to his mother: "I don't remember much about her views of voting nor her social prestige; and what her ideas on child training, diet, and eugenics were, I cannot recall. The main thing that sifts back to me now through the thick undergrowth of years is that she loved me. She liked to lie on the grass with me and tell stories,

or to run and hide with us children. She was always hugging me. And I liked it. She had a sunny face. To me it was like God, and all the beatitudes saints tell of Him. And sing! Of all the sensations pleasurable to my life nothing can compare with the rapture of crawling up into her lap and going to sleep while she swung to and fro in her rocking chair and sang. Thinking of this, I wonder if the woman of today, with all her tremendous notions and plans, realizes what an almighty factor she is in shaping of her child for weal or woe. I wonder if she realizes how much sheer love and attention count for in a child's life."

Mothers, your teenage children also need that same kind of love and attention. It seems easier for many mothers and fathers to express and show their love to their children when they are young, but more difficult when they are older. Work at this prayerfully. There need be no generation gap. And the key is love. Our young people need love and attention, not indulgence. They need empathy and understanding, not indifference from mothers and fathers. They need the parents' time. A mother's kindly teachings and her love for and confidence in a teenage son or daughter can literally save them from a wicked world.

From an address by President Benson at a fireside for parents on 22 February 1987.