



These, Our Little Ones

BY PRESIDENT GORDON B. HINCKLEY

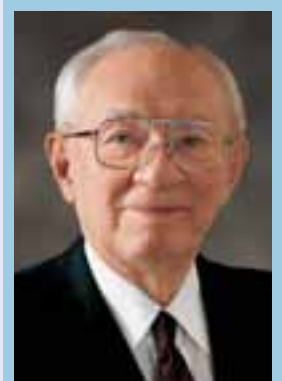
Once when our grandchildren were small, my wife and I took some of them to the circus. I recall that I was more interested in watching them and many others of their kind than in watching the man on the flying trapeze. I looked at them in wonder as they alternately laughed and stared wide-eyed at the exciting things before them. And I thought of the miracle of children who become the world's constant renewal of life and purpose. Observing them in the intensity of their interest, even in this atmosphere, I felt my mind revert to that beautiful and touching scene recorded in the book of 3 Nephi when the resurrected Lord took little children in His arms and wept as He blessed them and said to the people, "Behold your little ones" (3 Nephi 17:23).

It is so obvious that the great good and the terrible evil in the world today are the sweet and the bitter fruits of the rearing of yesterday's children. As we train a new generation, so will the world be in a few years. If you are worried about the future, then look to the upbringing of your children. Wisely did the writer of Proverbs declare, "Train up a child in

the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

When I was a boy, we lived on a fruit farm in the summer. We grew great quantities of peaches. Our father took us to tree pruning demonstrations put on by the agricultural college. Each Saturday during January and February, we would go out to the farm and prune the trees. We learned that by clipping and sawing in the right places, even when snow was on the ground and the wood appeared dead, we could shape a tree so that the sun would touch the fruit which was to come with spring and summer. We learned that in February we could pretty well determine the kind of fruit we would pick in September.

E. T. Sullivan once wrote these interesting words: "When God wants a great work done in the world or a great wrong righted, he goes about it in a very unusual way. He doesn't stir up his earthquakes or send forth his thunderbolts. Instead, he has a helpless baby born, perhaps in a simple home and of some obscure mother. And then God puts the idea into the mother's heart, and she puts it into



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the baby's mind. And then God waits. The greatest forces in the world are not the earthquakes and the thunderbolts. The greatest forces in the world are babies."¹

And those babies, I should like to add, will become forces for good or ill, depending in large measure on how they are reared. The Lord, without equivocation, has declared, "I have commanded you to bring up your children in light and truth" (D&C 93:40).

Four Imperatives

If I may be pardoned for suggesting the obvious, I do so only because the obvious is not observed in so many instances. The obvious includes four imperatives with reference to children: (1) love them, (2) teach them, (3) respect them, and (4) pray with them and for them.

There once was a commonly seen bumper sticker that asked the question, "Have you hugged your child today?" How fortunate, how blessed is the child who feels the affection of his or her parents. That warmth, that love will bear sweet fruit in the years that follow. In large measure, the harshness that characterizes so much of our society is an outgrowth of harshness imposed on children years ago.

The neighborhood in which I grew up was a microcosm of the world, with many varieties of people. They were a close-knit group, and I think we knew them all. I think also we loved them all—that is, except for one man. I must make a confession: I detested that man. I have since repented of that emotion, but as I look back, I can sense again the intensity of my feeling. Why this strong antipathy? Because he whipped his children with strap or stick or whatever came to hand as his vicious anger flared on the slightest provocation.

Perhaps it was because of the home in which I lived, where there was a father who, by some quiet magic, was able to discipline his children without the use of any

instrument of punishment, though on occasion they may have deserved it.

I have since discovered that the man I disliked was one of that very substantial body of parents who seem incapable of anything but harshness toward those for whose coming into the world they are responsible. I

have also come to realize that this man, who walks in the memories of my childhood, is but an example of uncounted thousands across the world who are known as child abusers. Every social worker, every duty officer in the emergency room of a large hospital, every police officer and judge in a large city can tell you of them. The whole tragic picture is one of beating, kicking, slamming, and even of sexual assault on small children. And akin to these violent child abusers are those vicious men and women who exploit children for pornographic purposes.

I have no disposition to dwell on this ugly picture. I wish to say only that no one who is a professed follower of Christ and no one who is a professed member of this Church can engage in such practices without offending God and repudiating the teachings of His Son. It was Jesus Himself who, while holding before us the example of the purity and innocence of children, declared, "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones . . . , it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6). Could there be a stronger denunciation of those who abuse children than these words spoken by the Savior of mankind?

Begin at Home

Do you want a spirit of love to grow in the world? Then begin within the walls of your own home. Behold your little ones, and see within them the wonders of God, from whose presence they have recently come.



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President Brigham Young (1801–77) once said: “A child loves the smiles of its mother, but hates her frowns. I tell the mothers not to allow the children to indulge in evils, but at the same time to treat them with mildness.”²

He further stated, “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.”³

Of course, there is need for discipline with families. But discipline with severity, discipline with cruelty, inevitably leads not to correction but rather to resentment and bitterness. It cures nothing and only aggravates the problem. It is self-defeating. The Lord, in setting forth the spirit of governance in His Church, has also set forth the spirit of governance in the home in these great words of revelation:

“No power or influence can or ought to be maintained . . . , only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; . . .

“Reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproved, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy;

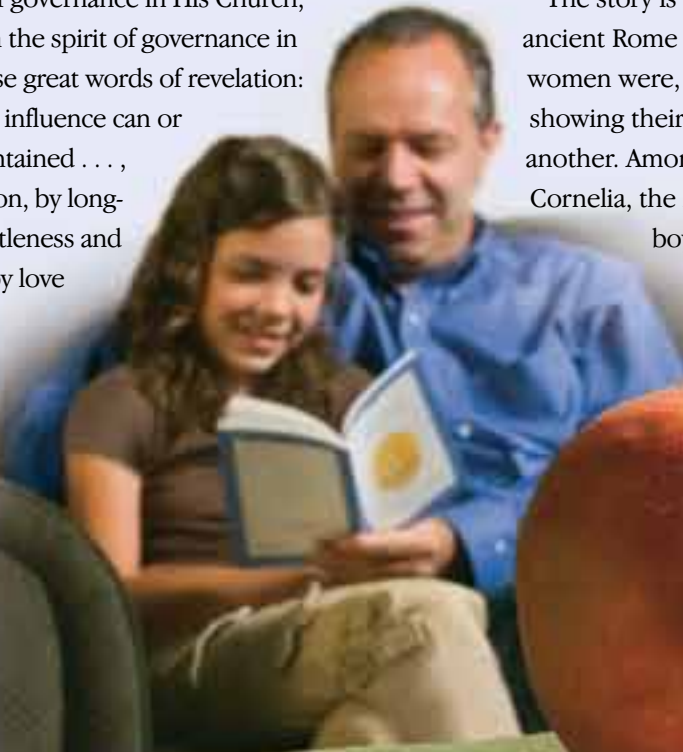
“That he may know that thy faithfulness is stronger than the cords of death” (D&C 121:41, 43–44).

The Endurance of Example

Behold your little ones, and teach them. I need not remind you that your example will do more than anything else in impressing upon their minds a pattern of life. It is always interesting to meet the children of old friends and to find in another generation the ways of their fathers and mothers.

The story is told that in ancient Rome a group of women were, with vanity, showing their jewels one to another. Among them was Cornelia, the mother of two boys. One of the women said to her, “And

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The noble Roman mother responded, pointing to her sons, “These are my jewels.” Under her tutelage they grew to become two of the most persuasive and effective reformers in Roman history.

where are your jewels?” To which Cornelia responded, pointing to her sons, “These are my jewels.” Under her tutelage and walking after the virtues of her life, they grew to become Gaius and Tiberius Gracchus—the Gracchi, as they were called—two of the most persuasive and effective reformers in Roman history. For as long as they are remembered and spoken of, the mother who reared them after the manner of her own life will be remembered and spoken of with praise also.

May I return again to the words of Brigham Young: “Let it be your constant care that the children that God has so kindly given you are taught in their early youth the importance of the oracles of God, and the beauty of the principles of our holy religion, that when they grow to the years of man and womanhood they may always cherish a tender regard for them and never forsake the truth.”⁴

I recognize that there are parents who, notwithstanding an outpouring of love and a diligent and faithful effort to teach them, see their children grow in a contrary manner and weep while their wayward sons and daughters willfully pursue courses of tragic consequence. For such I have great sympathy, and to them I am wont to quote the words of Ezekiel: “The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son” (Ezekiel 18:20).

But such is the exception rather than the rule. Nor does the exception justify others of us from making every effort in showing forth love, example, and correct precept in the rearing of those for whom God has given us sacred responsibility.

Nor let us ever forget the need to respect these, our little ones. Under the revealed word of the Lord, we know they are children of God as we are children of



CORNÉLIE MÈRE DES GRACQUES. BY NOËL HALLÉ

God, deserving of that respect which comes of knowledge of that eternal principle. In fact, the Lord made it clear that unless we develop in our own lives that purity, that lack of guile, that innocence of evil, we cannot enter into His presence. Declared He, “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3).

Channing Pollock once wrote these interesting and provocative words: “Contemplating the adolescence through which we scorned the wrong, some of us must wish . . . that we could be born old, and grow younger and cleaner and ever simpler and more innocent, until at last, with the white souls of little children, we lay us down to eternal sleep.”⁵

Sources of Strength

Behold your little ones. Pray with them. Pray for them and bless them. The world into which they are moving is a complex and difficult world. They will run into heavy seas of adversity. They will need all the strength and all the faith you can give them while they are yet near you. And they will also need a greater strength which comes of a higher power. They must do more than go along with what they find. They must lift the world, and the only levers they will have are the example of their own lives and the powers of persuasion that will come of their testimonies and their knowledge of the things of God. They will need the help of the Lord. While they are young, pray with them that they may come to know that source of strength which shall then always be available in every hour of need.

I love to hear children pray. I appreciate hearing parents pray for their children. I stand reverently before a father who, in the authority of the holy priesthood, lays his hands upon the head of a son or daughter at a time of serious decision and in the name of the Lord and under the direction of the Holy Spirit gives a father’s blessing.

How much more beautiful would be the world and the society in which we live if every father looked upon his children as the most precious of his assets, if he led them by the power of his example in kindness and love, and if in times of stress he blessed them by the authority of the holy

priesthood; and if every mother regarded her children as the jewels of her life, as gifts from the God of heaven, who is their Eternal Father, and brought them up with true affection in the wisdom and admonition of the Lord.

Said Isaiah of old, “All thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children” (Isaiah 54:13). To which I add, “Great also shall be the peace and the gladness of their fathers and mothers.” ■

NOTES

1. In Charles L. Wallis, ed., *The Treasure Chest* (1965), 53.
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (1997), 340.
3. *Teachings: Brigham Young*, 172.
4. *Teachings: Brigham Young*, 172.
5. “The World’s Slow Stain,” *Reader’s Digest*, June 1960, 77.

IDEAS FOR HOME TEACHERS

After prayerfully studying this message, share it using a method that encourages the participation of those you teach. Following are some examples:

1. Show a picture of the Savior with children. Invite the family to read and discuss some of the scriptures that President Hinckley quotes in the article. Illustrate the scriptures with examples from the article. Conclude by sharing how these scriptures have guided you.
2. To demonstrate the ripple effect, drop a small object into a bowl of water. Read portions of the “Four Imperatives” section to emphasize the effect of parents’ actions on their children. Conclude by reading the last two paragraphs of the article.
3. If the family has young children, illustrate the power of example by having family members mimic one person. That person could clap hands, take three steps, turn around, and so on. Read the first paragraph in the section “The Endurance of Example,” and share the story of the Roman woman and her attitude toward her children. Discuss how her example influenced her sons. Consider sharing one or two quotations from that section. Testify of the power of example.