



# THE POWER OF Early Preparation

*As the world continues to grow more wicked, we must grow more faithful.  
Our success will depend on how soon and how carefully we prepare.*

**By Ronald Errol Bartholomew**

**I**n my home growing up, my parents decided our family should hold family scripture study every day from 5:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m. By the time I was in high school, I had become increasingly unhappy about this “early morning family tradition” and did all I could to show my lack of appreciation for it. I’d put my blanket over my head, lie on my pillow, and snore out loud in protest. But my parents persevered. We read and re-read the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and even the Bible using an audio recording.

When I left home for college I was disappointed to discover that I had lost the ability to sleep in. I woke up every day at 5:00 a.m., no matter what, and without trying. As a full-time missionary I realized how valuable my parents’ insistence on consistent early morning prayer and scripture study was. It happened when I was asked to speak in Church my first Sunday in Korea.

I was concerned that I had no idea about what I was going to say, especially given the difficulties of a new language. But I had agreed to speak, so I prepared as well—or as feebly—as I could. Then it was time, and there I was, looking out on the audience of Korean Saints and investigators. I was suddenly struck with the realization

that, although I didn’t know much Korean, I knew many lessons from the scriptures. That thought imbued me with confidence. My parents’ discipline was now paying off—I could talk about the scriptures. So I shared a few stories from the Old Testament using the best Korean I could, then sat down, filled with gratitude for those many long years of early morning scripture study.

Over the years, I’ve learned that the example my parents set for me as they prepared me for my mission and adulthood was something I could implement in the lives of my own children. In fact, preparing our children is something we as parents must do. President Henry B. Eyring pointed out why:

“We will need to have developed and nurtured faith in Jesus Christ long before Satan hits us, as he will, with doubts and appeals to our carnal desires and with lying voices saying that good is bad and that there is no sin. Those spiritual storms are already raging. We can expect that they will worsen until the Savior returns.

“However much faith to obey God we now have, we will need to strengthen it continually and keep it refreshed constantly. We can do that by deciding now to be more quick to obey and more determined to endure. Learning to start

early and to be steady are the keys to spiritual preparation. Procrastination and inconsistency are its mortal enemies.”<sup>1</sup>

As President Eyring explained, because the current storms will only increase, our current level of preparation also needs to increase. The secret to our success is to be consistent and to start early.

### Focus on Eternal Priorities

Sometimes it is difficult to incorporate the practices of personal and family prayer, scripture study, and temple attendance into our busy daily lives. That is why it is important to plan frequently how we are going to accomplish these goals. As a friend of mine once mused, “If I were the devil, I don’t think I could get to Latter-day Saints with any of the big sins. I think I would just keep them busy.”

We need to make sure we don’t allow anything to interfere with our divine duties to prepare ourselves and our children early and consistently. This can involve a lot more than just busy schedules.

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said that “some parents become so expert at filling every physical desire for their children that they begin to suppose that all is well in this life and that their eternal stewardship is progressing right on schedule. . . . I believe that we must pause and take a careful inventory to determine how well our families are doing spiritually. We could ask how well are we feeding, nurturing, training, and exercising the spirits of our children; or how well have we taught, trained, loved, and inspired our children to build their spiritual muscles and strength? . . . Remember, eternity is now, not a vague, distant future. We prepare each day, right now, for eternal life. If we are not preparing for eternal life, we are preparing for something else, perhaps something far less.”<sup>2</sup>

Though we may be necessarily preparing our youth for short-term goals, we cannot allow those things to distract us from our larger eternal goals. We need to start early to establish regular patterns of gospel living.

### Develop a Love for Gospel Truths

One important part of preparing our children for eternity is helping them learn and develop a love for gospel



*We also need to focus on eternal truths through family prayer, family home evening, and family gospel study—especially the Book of Mormon.*

truths. The Lord once reminded the Prophet Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon that Satan would try to take away light and truth from their families “through disobedience . . . and because of the tradition of their fathers” (D&C 93:39). He reminded them that “truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come.” He said that “whatsoever was *more or less than this [truth]* is the spirit of that wicked one who was a liar from the beginning” (D&C 93:24–25; emphasis added).

One of the challenges Satan places in our paths is to distract us from gospel truths by causing us to focus on things that may be true but not important. That can lead to a myriad of problems, including frustration with oneself, family, friends, and even the gospel.

Here’s an example: The doctrine or “truth” about having babies is simple and wonderful. Babies are Heavenly Father’s spirit children who need to come to the earth and receive bodies as part of His eternal plan of bringing to pass their immortality and eternal life. We get to participate in this wondrous plan as parents, advisors, friends, and mentors.

But there are a lot of things that are true about having babies that, from a certain point of view, are not so nice.

These ideas can even distract us from the heavenly plan. For example, babies are cute but inconvenient, adorable but expensive. Babies often smell bad and keep one awake in the night. And the more babies you have, the more stretched your financial and physical resources may become. Besides, babies can cause stretch marks and weight gain. Having babies may disrupt a woman's long-term career aspirations.

Each of these observations about babies is true—and the emotional distress such issues can cause are certainly real. However, none of them encourages us to embrace the saving *truth* about babies and their role in the plan of salvation. In fact, if we place too much of our focus on these true facts about having babies, we may find ourselves at odds with Heavenly Father's plan for us as individuals and as members of a family. As we raise a family, we learn to be unselfish, to love others more than ourselves, to serve, to sacrifice, and to teach. Learning these traits helps us to become more like our Heavenly Father, who has said that His work is "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life" of His children (Moses 1:39).

As we do everything we can to prepare ourselves and our children spiritually now and for future storms, we must learn and emphasize gospel *truths* over things that are distracting, even if they are factually true.

### Read The Book of Mormon

President Marion G. Romney said if we prayerfully and regularly read the Book of Mormon in our homes and with our children, "the spirit of that great book will come to permeate our homes and all who dwell therein. The spirit of reverence will increase; mutual respect and consideration for each other will grow. The spirit of contention will depart. . . . Faith, hope, and charity—the pure love of Christ—will abound in our homes and lives."<sup>3</sup> I have seen these changes occur slowly and incrementally over many years of serious and consistent personal and family study. These blessings are not always realized in their fulness immediately.

When I was serving as a stake Young Men president, the decision was made to reenact scenes from the Book of Mormon for youth conference. When we experienced

unusual difficulty in finding a mature couple who were available to play the parts of Lehi and Sariah, a thought came to me: "Ask your parents." I inquired and they agreed to do it.

The first evening of the three-day youth conference culminated with a reenactment of Lehi's dream. It was dark, so the leaders were all busy helping the youth find and hold onto an iron rod that led them to a tree representing the tree of life, which was illuminated in a clearing on the top of a large hill. As the youth approached the tree, my parents, acting as Lehi and Sariah, picked glowing "fruit" hanging from this tree and distributed it to them. It just so happened that I was the last person to arrive at the tree. As I approached the tree after a long and exhausting day, I had a sudden epiphany when I considered that the two people representing Lehi and Sariah were in fact my own parents. The scene took on special significance when my father reached up and pulled some of the fruit from the tree and handed it to me. Then I understood something clearly: as a young man I hadn't received my knowledge of the gospel from someone else—I had received it from my father and mother—one day at a time, one morning at a time, amidst my grumbling and moaning and complaining. It occurred to me that in Lehi's dream, the Lord hadn't come down and personally called Nephi to the tree—He did so through Nephi's father, Lehi—and for me, it was my parents.

As we strive to prepare ourselves and our youth spiritually, we can have a tremendous impact—even though we may not readily be aware of it. Thus, we must be patient. Rearing children in the gospel is a process, not an event. The secret is to start early, be consistent, plan for life's demands, focus on eternal truths, and study the gospel—especially the Book of Mormon. Through our efforts, trusting in the Savior's grace to compensate for our weaknesses, we can succeed. And through these efforts, we can find peace in our lives and joy with our children. ■

### NOTES

1. Henry B. Eyring, "Spiritual Preparedness: Start Early and Be Steady," *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2005, 38.
2. M. Russell Ballard, "Spiritual Development," *Ensign*, Nov. 1978, 66.
3. Marion G. Romney, "The Book of Mormon," *Ensign*, May 1980, 67.