

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

I love and am grateful for my young children, but I sometimes get distracted or discouraged by the practical details of raising a family and I struggle to remember what an important work it is. How can I better align my day-to-day actions and attitudes with gospel truths about family?



PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBERT CASEY

The following are responses from members describing their personal approaches to this challenge.

Life as a mother of young children has filled my days with some of the most beautiful adventures and discoveries—and some of the greatest exhaustion and discouragement. Though I still have much to learn, the following guidelines have helped me.

Focus on what you do well. With so much that we could do better, it's easy to lose sight of our strengths. At an exhausting and trying time just after my third baby was born, a friend complimented me on being patient. I had been counting only my weaknesses, and her words were a flicker of light on a dark road. I thought, "I *am* pretty patient." And with that positive thought, it became easier to

be more patient—as well as more cheerful and relaxed with my children. When we're focused only on what we're doing badly, it's hard to feel the Spirit and, consequently, to experience joy.

Don't run faster than you have strength. Too much of a good thing is, well, too much. It's hard for me to feel happy when I'm tired and overscheduled. And when we're not happy, it's hard to enjoy the quirky chaos children bring to our lives. Occasionally, it seems we're trying so hard to be good examples of diligence, hard work, and service that we forget to bless our children with an example of calm, happy peacefulness.

One thing that helps me is to limit my to-do list to three or four of the most important tasks. Of course, sometimes this means that things must wait until later in the week.

I also try not to do too much multi-tasking. In our family, I've found that spilled milk is a tragedy only if I have planned a million activities for the day and am trying to serve breakfast while also checking my e-mail and getting laundry started. Families with young children need space in the day to wiggle. Parents of young children need space in the day to breathe. Emptiness, anger, and exhaustion are

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not what Heavenly Father expects from or desires for us.

Try to keep the big picture in sight.

As my children get older, I realize there are good and bad parts to each stage of our lives together. Many of the challenges pass with time. So do some of the joys. I try to take stock of the joys, to imprint them on my memory for the days when the long, sleepless nights have passed—and with them the sweet, soft smell of a baby's warm head against my neck.

Jean Knight Pace, Indiana

I always dreamed that I would one day be a stay-at-home mom. My dream entailed being a hands-on mother who homeschooled her children, cleaned and cooked, sewed all of the family's clothes, took care of the neighbors, and had lengthy gospel discussions with the children, all of which I accomplished while maintaining a perfect garden, of course.

This is a far cry from the reality in which I live. I am a working mother by necessity; in addition to the challenges of providing an income, it is up to me to take care of many day-to-day tasks while still making time for my one-year-old son.

Whether alone or with a spouse, it is easy to become distracted in today's world. On more days than not, I feel too tired and overwhelmed to go to church, serve in my calling, or pray, but I know that my son will not develop a love for the gospel unless he first sees it reflected in his mother.

Here are some things I try to do that have helped me:

- Understand and accept my limitations.
- Focus on the basics, and keep things simple.
- Remember others in their struggles.
- Accept help and service from others.

• Seek blessings and counsel from priesthood leaders.

- Record blessings and impressions as soon as possible. Reading them provides comfort when I am feeling down or overwhelmed. It also reminds me that Heavenly Father is mindful of me, my situation, and my potential for eternal progression.

As busy as we are, frequently making time to show our children we love them will have an eternal impact.



PHOTOGRAPH BY MATT REIER

Regularly praying with my son, singing Primary songs to him, reading scriptures aloud, and having family home evening each week have helped me focus on gospel basics, strengthening me as a mother in Zion. The few minutes here and there that we spend in these activities add up. They bring the Spirit into our home and give me strength to press forward another day. I know that in the process I am teaching my son what is truly important.

Shannon Andrews, Arizona

I find that with four young children, it is easy for us to get caught up in the mundane trivialities of day-to-day tasks. Setting goals for scripture study, family home evening, and family prayer makes it easier to keep track of where we are on the “spiritual ladder.” Involving children in planning and coordinating family time can help them learn responsibility and will help them take pride in their accomplishments. It’s never too late to start setting goals as a family; the spiritual dividends that can be gained are too great to pass up.

Michael Smith, Utah

When my children were young, I made a habit of asking them two questions as I tucked them into bed at night:

- What was your favorite time today?
- Did you have any sad times today that you would like to tell me about?

Their answers helped me determine how well I was aligning my day-to-day actions and attitudes with gospel truths about family.

Andrea H. Sloop, Virginia

For me, the answer has been to go back to the basics, beginning with me personally. I make it a priority

When my children were young, I made a habit of asking them each night about their favorite time and if they had any sad times that day.

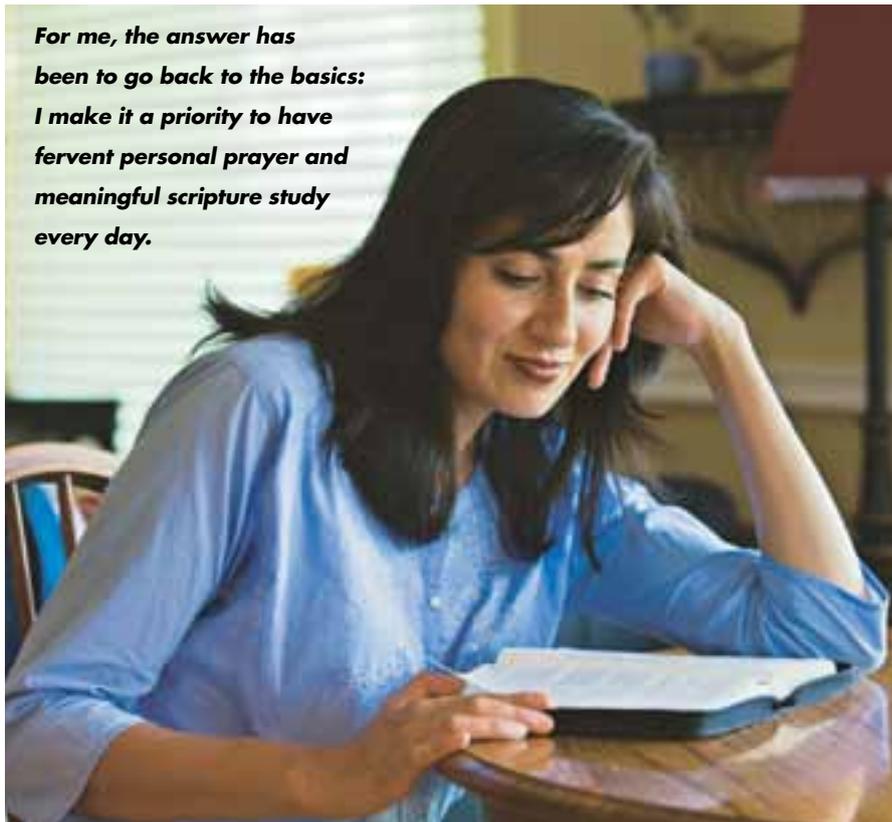


to have fervent personal prayer and meaningful scripture study every day. Even though my children are young, I pray for them to have spiritual experiences. And as I read the scriptures, I look for lessons about how to bless and teach my children. We also strive to hold family home evening and family scripture study using methods that are appropriate for our young family. For instance, we often use the Gospel Art Picture kit to explain scripture stories or gospel principles and then to bear testimony. I think of our children as “little investigators” who are learning the gospel.

I have found that as I have done these simple yet vitally important things, the spirit of love in our home has increased. I have gone about my tasks with an eternal perspective in mind, and I take pride and find joy in my role as a mother and homemaker.
Megan Broughton, North Dakota

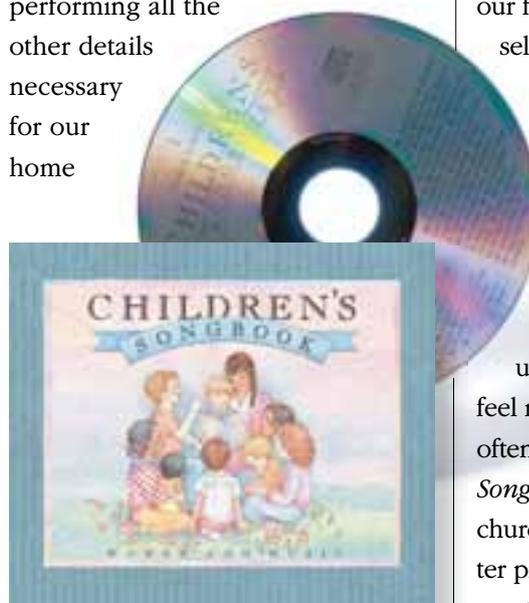
When I feel as though I’m spending most of my time cleaning up after our little family, it is usually because I am! Sometimes the practical details are not actually as important as they seem. I find that if I take a break from the routine—maybe visit a new park, try a new recipe, spend time with someone in the ward who also has a baby or young child, go on an unexpected walk, make a card, or surprise someone with a visit—with my daughter—my perspective is refreshed. I remember why I do all the things I do: because I love

For me, the answer has been to go back to the basics: I make it a priority to have fervent personal prayer and meaningful scripture study every day.



PHOTOGRAPH BY CRAIG DIMOND

her. She loves the change from our normal routine, and enjoying the time together helps us grow closer. It also reminds me that when I go back to cleaning and cooking and performing all the other details necessary for our home



Listening to hymns and Primary songs at home will foster a sense of peace and love.

to run smoothly, I am serving her and my husband. It’s easier to clean when I’m choosing to serve!
C. Mae Jansen, Texas

One thing that has really helped our family is following the counsel of Elder Jay E. Jensen of the Presidency of the Seventy to “listen to the hymns more frequently in our homes, inviting the Spirit to prevail.”¹ Listening to the hymns, Primary songs, or the Mormon Tabernacle Choir at home helps us focus on gospel essentials and feel more peace in our home. We often play a CD from the *Children’s Songbook* in the car on the way to church, which not only seems to better prepare me to feel the Spirit in my meetings but also helps our children be more reverent. We also play these CDs for our children at night as they go to bed.



No matter how late or hurried we are, we have morning and evening family prayer to invite the Spirit into our lives.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MATT REIER

Another practice we have tried to adopt is adding more songs to our family home evenings, scripture study, and time before family prayer. The children enjoy choosing some of their favorite Primary songs to sing, and it brings a spirit of unity to our family. Singing or listening to Church music as I work around the house or tend my children helps put things into eternal perspective. I feel happier and am able to feel more of Heavenly Father's love for me in my life.

Rebekah Jakeman, Washington

My wife, Julie, and I know that as parents, we are responsible for providing our children with proper teachings and guidance beginning in their early years. As we see it, our responsibility is not only to provide the necessities of life but also to prepare them for the necessities of eternity.

One of the ways we try to do this

is through consistent family prayer. No matter how late or hurried we are, we have morning and evening family prayer to invite the Spirit into our lives. Then, at bedtime, Julie and I help each child with his or her individual prayers. This is often a great opportunity to talk briefly about the gospel. It gives our children a chance to ask questions. In answering them, we sometimes open the scriptures, but most of the time, these shared moments are informal chats.

Our hope is that by helping our children develop righteous patterns in their lives and by helping them understand gospel principles in their youth, we will help them build the foundation they need to navigate successfully through life's challenges and to ultimately return to live with their Heavenly Father.

Matthew J. Martinez, Arizona

When I am feeling overwhelmed with the meals to be cooked and clothes to be washed, I take comfort in knowing that when we do for others what they cannot do for themselves, we become more Christlike. Young children need a great deal of temporal care. When we recognize that nurturing our children is a spiritual endeavor, finding joy in our everyday labors becomes easier.

Miranda H. Lotz, Montana

I've found it challenging—even dizzying—to balance the diverse needs of my children, who range in age from 3 to 21. However, knowing that these feelings are normal eases potential feelings of inadequacy. When I do feel discouraged or distracted, several things have brought me greater peace:

Perspective. Remembering that God's work is to "bring to pass the

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immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39) reminds me that I am a partner in His great work. This thought adds value to even the most mundane of parenting tasks.

Study. Studying the scriptures, reading Church magazines, and reading uplifting, thought-provoking literature feeds my mind when I’m overwhelmed with the practical details of homemaking and childcare. Just one page can be enough to ponder while I fold a load of laundry or feed an infant late at night. Reading also helps me feel connected to other adults when I’m surrounded by children all day.

Writing. Writing in my journal or sending letters to family and friends helps me voice my thoughts and feelings even when there is no time or opportunity for personal visits. Likewise, I periodically write in journals for each of my children, hoping they may enjoy things I thought about them and wanted to share when they were young.

Time away from children. Making time for my husband and me by regularly arranging for child care has benefited our whole family for the past 23 years. Swapping or hiring babysitting for a few hours a week or delegating the care of younger children to our teenagers has helped my husband and me find time to talk and laugh together. Knowing those hours were on the horizon has kept me going when I’ve felt overwhelmed. My children

SHARE YOUR IDEAS

An upcoming Questions and Answers feature will focus on the following question:

My spouse and I are struggling to make ends meet in today’s economy. We dream of being able to own a home, but the cost of living seems to rise faster than salaries do. We’d also like to be able to have Mom stay at home with the children, but it seems that unless both parents work, we won’t be able to provide even the basic necessities for our family. What can we do?

If you would like to share your ideas, please label your submission “Family and Economy” and follow the guidelines under “Do You Have a Story to Tell?” in the contents pages at the beginning of the magazine. Please limit responses to 500 words and submit them by July 17, 2009.

Sometimes taking a break from our routines to do something unexpected, such as an unplanned walk with a child, helps us remember why we do all the things we do: because we love them.

have in turn benefited from learning to play with others and spend time away from me. We all come back refreshed. ■

Nanette Rasband Hilton, Nevada

NOTE

1. Jay E. Jensen, “The Nourishing Power of Hymns,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, May 2007, 13.



PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBERT CASEY