

Righteous, Intentional Parenting

Raising children isn't easy, but the Savior's example can inspire us to parent in righteous, intentional ways.

By **Ralphie Jacobs**

While in the midst of a busy evening at home, I encouraged all of my children to start our daily tradition of working together to clean up after dinner. One particular daughter was simply out of sorts, moaning and whining about things being too hard and loudly reminding us all that we were making her life miserable. As she turned the corner in a huff, the glass bowl that she carried fell to the floor and shattered across the kitchen. What a mess!

I looked at her, her eyes brimming with tears, and an inspired thought came to my mind: “What would Jesus do?”

I bent down and started helping her clean up. We worked side by side quietly until it was finished. About 15 minutes later, she came up to me, leaned in for a hug, and said, “I’m so sorry, Mom, that I broke the bowl.” With a clear perspective in my heart, it wasn’t difficult for me to reply, “It’s OK. It’s just a bowl. I love you so much more.”

Intentional, Christlike Parenting

In his first public statement as President of the Church, President Russell M. Nelson said, “I thank God . . . for parents who are serious about their commitment to righteous, intentional parenting.”¹

Most parents probably hope to be counted among that group. We care deeply about our families and the work we do in our homes. It’s no secret, however, that parenting is very hard. How blessed we are to have our Savior’s example as we navigate learning how to parent in righteous, intentional ways.



What is righteous, intentional parenting? Intentional parenting is Christlike parenting. It is making decisions about how you will respond (rather than react) to your child's behavior in a purposeful and deliberate way that teaches skills and nurtures connection.

As guardians of our families, our greatest responsibility is to create a home that is full of Christlike love, a home that is a safe teaching environment, where children can learn the happiness that comes from doing what is right. It is a place where parents model compassion and seeing the good in others. It is not a place that is governed by fear and dominion but rather a sanctuary where growth is recognized and encouraged.

Pattern for Intentional Parenting

How do we parent as Jesus Christ would and create this kind of home environment? We follow His pattern. We do our best to walk in His footsteps, especially when honoring our sacred role as parents.² Christlike, intentional parenting is done purposefully, with resolve and earnest attention. It truly looks like learning on the parent's part, practicing deliberately because our minds and hearts are open to growth.

There are many ways that we can apply the Savior's example to our lives, and as we learn more about Him, we discover many divine attributes that give us guideposts for how to interact with and raise our children. The following are four ways to apply His example to our commitment to righteous, intentional parenting.



1. Be a living example.

Jesus Christ's Example

- Jesus was patient, compassionate, long-suffering, and gentle. He is the “supreme example of the power of humility.”³ He taught us to “walk in the meekness of [His] Spirit” (Doctrine and Covenants 19:23).
- Jesus did not revile, meaning He never spoke to others abusively or with contempt. Even when He was faced with cruelty, Jesus knew that the best way to change hearts was through love and understanding. To not revile or use abusive language is one of the Savior's most important messages to us. He reminded us that “he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me” (3 Nephi 11:29).

Parenting Application

- Stay close to your children. Learn how to listen to them without any judgment or belittling so that when they need help they will come to you. Pay attention to their point of view when something goes wrong, and allow their struggles to create compassion within you.
- Be calm and wise during those times when emotions run high. Remember that your children learn from your example, so seek to develop traits of long-suffering, patience, gentleness, and meekness (see Alma 13:28).
- Model being happy. Look on the bright side of things and show your children how to handle disappointment and conflict in a healthy way. For example, “I had a bad day at work, but let's go play catch. That will help me feel better.”



2. Teach your children.

Jesus Christ's Example

- Jesus spent most of His ministry on earth teaching. He taught the same principles many times, changing the way that He taught to suit the learner.
- Jesus knew that a sin was often committed because the sinner didn't fully understand the blessings of keeping the commandments. He taught about Heavenly Father and the gospel and forgave those who repented.
- Jesus said we should come to Him with "a broken heart and a contrite spirit" (3 Nephi 9:20), making us more receptive and teachable.

Parenting Application

- You are your child's teacher. When your child misbehaves, instead of reaching for punishments, think about how you can better teach your child to behave well. Think, "What does my child need to learn?" Teaching allows your child to build skills that can be used in the future.
- Teach your children when they are ready to learn. Wait for them to be teachable by allowing time to create calm within the child and within yourself (see 3 Nephi 17:3). When they are ready, teach them about specific behaviors that you would like to see. Find nonthreatening settings for teaching, such as a family meeting with role-plays. Make learning new skills a happy experience by giving lots of praise.
- Redirect your children. Focus on the positive form of the behavior. For example, instead of saying, "Stop running," say, "Walking feet." Focus your energy on teaching them what they should do.
- Expect that you will need to teach the same concept multiple times, whether you're teaching a child about faith or about tidying up their room. President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) reminded us that "repetition is a law of learning."⁴





3. Look for the good.

Jesus Christ's Example

- Jesus “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38) and pointed out the good He saw in others (see, for example, John 1:47; 3 Nephi 27:30).
- Our Savior taught the law of the harvest, that we reap what we sow. He taught that to bear good fruit, the ground must be nourished and cared for. (See Jacob 5; Doctrine and Covenants 6:33.)

Parenting Application

- Look for the good in your children. Build them up and let them know that all the good they do is valued and seen. Paying attention to a child when they are behaving well is the best way to make that behavior stronger. It connects good feelings with good behavior, and as a result, they learn to love to do what is right.
- Use praise as a tool to nurture within them a strong character. Say things like “Thank you for waiting for me. That’s being patient.” Children respond so much better to responsibility when they know their good deed will be recognized.





4. Allow your children to make choices.

Jesus Christ's Example

- The Savior gave His life for us that we might learn and become better through our choices, including opening our hearts to repentance and forgiveness.
- The Savior uses laws to guide our choices and to teach us the connection between agency and consequences.

Parenting Application

- Keep a long-term perspective and help your children to become strong and capable adults by setting clear expectations and then giving them autonomy and control over their decisions.
- Allow your child's choices to become a vehicle for many life lessons. Do not take away their opportunities to learn from the consequences of their exercised agency.



Creating a Loving Home

We all have struggles and trials within the walls of our homes. There is not one home that is free from challenges, because this is part of Heavenly Father's plan to refine us so that we might reach our full potential as eternal parents. He doesn't desire that we just wade through affliction, however; He asks us to seek His counsel and be willing to change and improve, and in turn He will magnify our abilities. With His help, we *can* make a commitment to righteous, intentional parenting by the Spirit, the kind of parenting that assures us that as long as we are centered on Jesus Christ and His gospel, from an eternal perspective "nothing can ever go permanently wrong."⁵

Following the Savior's pattern (even when you feel there is little hope) will help keep your children close and create a Christlike countenance about you. Intentional parenting keeps you focused on the most rewarding work you will ever do—creating a loving home. ■

The author lives in Texas, USA.

NOTES

1. Russell M. Nelson, "As We Go Forward Together," *Ensign*, Apr. 2018, 5.
2. See "I'm Trying to Be like Jesus," *Children's Songbook*, 78–79.
3. Richard C. Edgley, "The Empowerment of Humility," *Ensign*, Nov. 2003, 99.
4. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Great Shall Be the Peace of Thy Children," *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 50.
5. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Howard W. Hunter* (2015), 1.