

A Righteous Father's Influence

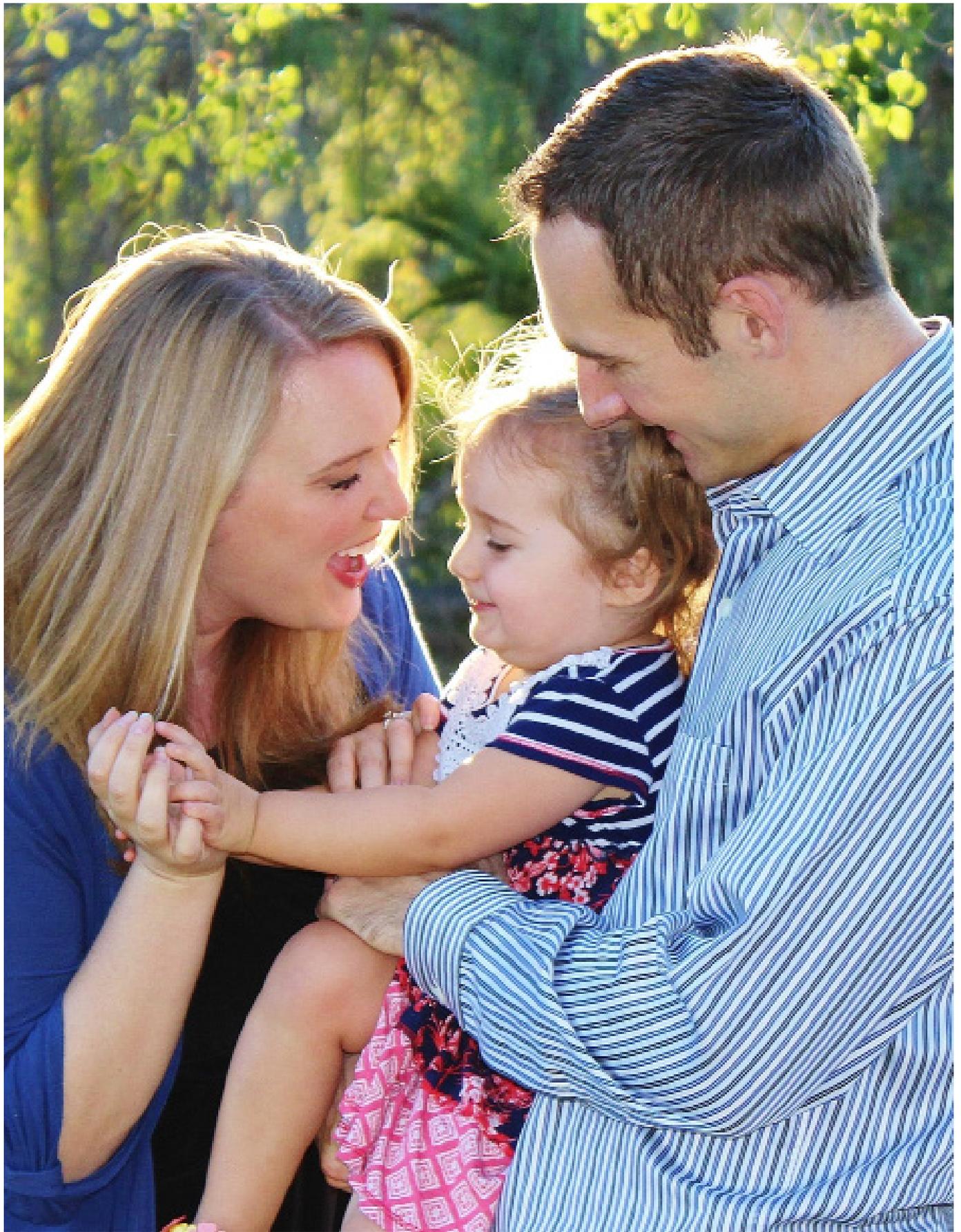
*By looking to righteous father figures
and my Heavenly Father, I learned
what true fatherhood is.*

By Megan Warren

Growing up, I didn't have an earthly father in my life to familiarize me with the kind of love my Heavenly Father has for me. Instead, I observed other men who emanated His love and were examples of true fatherhood. President James E. Faust (1920–2007), Second Counselor in the First Presidency, taught, "Noble fatherhood gives us a glimpse of the divine attributes of our Father in Heaven."¹ Through the examples of many father figures, including extended family members, Church leaders, righteous men in the scriptures, and even diligent home teachers, I learned about Heavenly Father's character and the noble attributes earthly fathers can develop to emulate Him. Eventually I was able to turn the heartache I felt from lacking an earthly father into rejoicing over the close relationship that I could develop with my Heavenly Father.

Steady and Supportive

Our Father in Heaven is unchanging. We read that He "is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Mormon 9:9). I have observed that noble earthly fathers follow Heavenly Father's example of being unwavering. A noble father is true to his word in all things. He understands that consistency helps his children feel secure and loved, and he is present in times of both crisis and joy.



PHOTOGRAPH OF THE AUTHOR WITH HER HUSBAND AND DAUGHTER BY JESSE WARREN

Our Heavenly Father also understands the kind of hard work it takes to be worthy to live with Him eternally. He knows each of us by name, and He allows us to have challenges in order to refine us. A noble earthly father also allows his children to struggle from time to time because he knows that challenges bring opportunities for growth.

My husband is a talented martial artist. He was taught by his father and often relates that his dad was harder on him than he was on the other students. His father's discipline strengthened him and helped him advance more quickly. Like our Heavenly Father, noble earthly fathers encourage their children to do their best while offering strength, love, and support.

“Works without End”

Our Heavenly Father's work is eternal and without end (see Alma 12:25–33). In a similar way, a noble earthly father's work also never ends. Noble fathers constantly do good works and strive for righteousness. They are true and honest in their adherence to God's commandments. They set aside selfish pursuits for the good of their family. In “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” living prophets have taught that “by divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families.”² This includes not just physical protection but spiritual protection as well. Noble fathers lead by example and offer love and counsel to their children. They also warn against spiritual danger when needed.

An Empowering Family Narrative

In his *New York Times* article “The Stories That Bind Us,” Bruce Feiler gives an overview of studies regarding the deterioration of the family. In these studies, psychologists found that children who demonstrated the greatest resilience had been exposed to an empowering family narrative, which helped them feel that they belonged to something bigger. “If you want a happier family,” says Feiler, “create, refine and retell the story of your family's

positive moments and your ability to bounce back from the difficult ones. That act alone may increase the odds that your family will thrive for many generations to come.”³

An example of this can be seen in Moses 1. Moses was empowered by his knowledge of God's plan and his own divine identity. When Satan came tempting him, Moses resiliently replied, “Who art thou? For behold, I am a son of God, in the similitude of his Only Begotten; and where is thy glory, that I should worship thee?” (Moses 1:13). Moses then even had the courage to command Satan to depart.

Noble earthly fathers empower their children by reminding them of their divine identity as spirit children of God. They help build a strong family through their good examples and ensure that their children take part in it. This gives their children a strong sense of purpose and the confidence to succeed.

Searching for a Noble Husband

When I was dating, I was seeking an eternal companion who would be a noble father. Since I grew up without that example in my childhood, it was harder for me to know all the characteristics that a noble earthly father should have. I was disappointed that my patriarchal blessing did not give more detailed direction about the person Heavenly Father wanted me to marry. It said only that I should seek someone who could take me to the temple. But even this seemingly simple instruction was challenged. Although I had some positive dating experiences, I often worried that either such a man did not truly exist or I was meant to suffer endless trials of the heart.

Despite my experience-driven anxiety, I continued to pray for a husband who would be a righteous father for my children, who would love them and stay present in their lives. Like my faithful mother, I knew that no matter what happened, I would be able to lean on my Eternal Father for support.

To my surprise and delight, my prayers were answered on Heavenly Father's perfect timetable. It is healing for me to observe my husband's loving example of what a



A watercolor painted by the author of her husband and daughter. She was inspired to pursue art by her home teacher—one of the father figures in her life.

father should be. I'm grateful he follows the examples set by prophets and apostles and that he chooses to cherish and love me unselfishly. His example as a loving husband also blesses our children. My heart is full of gratitude for his faithfulness through trials, his example of hard work, his worthiness to exercise the priesthood, and the pure, unwavering love he demonstrates as a young father.

The Fathers around Us

There is no limit to the influence of a man who understands, like Moses, who he is. Sister Sheri Dew, former Second Counselor in the Relief Society General Presidency, taught that all women who nurture fulfill the role of motherhood, even when they are not yet mothers. "*We are all mothers in Israel*," she testified, "and our calling is to love and help lead the rising generation through the dangerous streets of mortality."⁴ Men who are righteous examples fulfill the role of being fathers in Israel, and their virtuous examples can extend beyond the reach of their own family.

After my childhood challenges, I am confident that Heavenly Father knew exactly what I needed to enable me

to trust my eternal companion. He placed many steadfast examples of fatherhood in my life. These included my righteous grandfather, who loved the Lord, and a diligent home teacher who—understanding my family's financial limitations—took me on as a student at his art studio and inspired me to follow in his footsteps professionally. In my young adult life, heavenly healing was also delivered through the unexpected blessing of gaining a righteous stepfather, who was patient with my hesitancy to trust a father figure and who continually showed me kindness.

Through the righteous influence of these father figures, I have found hope, healing, and joy. I am grateful for all men who follow the example set by our Father in Heaven and strive to be examples of noble fatherhood. ■

The author lives in California, USA.

NOTES

1. James E. Faust, "Them That Honour Me I Will Honour," *Ensign*, May 2001, 46; *Liahona*, July 2001, 54.
2. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2017, 145.
3. Bruce Feiler, "The Stories That Bind Us," *New York Times*, Mar. 15, 2013, nytimes.com.
4. Sheri L. Dew, "Are We Not All Mothers?" *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 97; *Liahona*, Jan. 2002, 113.