



Bringing Up Children in Light and Truth

“The first duty pertaining to the training of the children of the Church belongs in the home.”

From the Life of Joseph Fielding Smith

President Joseph Fielding Smith described his father, President Joseph F. Smith, as “one in whom I have had more confidence than in anyone else I have known in this world.”¹ He recalled that his father frequently gathered the family, “instructing his children in the principles of the gospel. They one and all rejoiced in his presence and were grateful for the words of counsel and instruction which he imparted. . . . They have never forgotten what they were taught, and the impressions have remained with them and will likely do so forever.”² He also said: “My father was the most tender-hearted man I ever knew. . . . Among my fondest memories are the hours I have spent by his side discussing principles of the gospel and receiving instruction as only he could give it. In this way the foundation for my own knowledge was laid in truth, so that I too can say I know that my Redeemer lives, and that Joseph Smith is, was, and always will be a prophet of the living God.”³

Joseph Fielding Smith also spoke lovingly of his mother, Julina L. Smith, and her teachings. He said: “I was trained at my mother’s knee to love the Prophet Joseph Smith and to love my Redeemer. . . . I am grateful for the training that I received and I tried to follow the counsel that was given to me by my father. But I must not give him all the credit. I think a good part of it, a very great part of it, should go to my mother whose knee I used to sit by as a little child and listen to her stories about the pioneers. . . . She used to teach me and put in my hands, when I was old enough to read, things that I could understand. She taught me to pray [and] to be true and



President Joseph Fielding Smith and his great-granddaughter Shanna McConkie

faithful to my covenants and obligations, to attend to my duties as a deacon and as a teacher . . . and later as a priest. . . . I had a mother who saw to it that I did read, and I loved to read.”⁴

When Joseph Fielding Smith became a father, he followed his parents’ example. His daughter Amelia said:

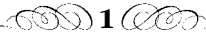
“Father was the perfect student and teacher, one who not only taught us from his great store of knowledge but encouraged us to learn on our own. . . .

“With his children he followed the counsel found in D&C 93:40: ‘But I have commanded you to bring up your children in light and truth.’

“He taught us at the breakfast table as he told us stories from the scriptures, and had the ability to make each one sound new and exciting though we had heard it many times before. The suspense I felt wondering if Pharaoh’s soldiers would find the gold cup in Benjamin’s sack of grain is real even today. We learned about Joseph Smith finding the plates of gold, and the visit of the Father and the Son. If Father had time to walk to school with us, the stories continued. We walked past the [Salt Lake] Temple on the way to school and he told us about the Angel Moroni. We learned the temple was a very special place, that you had to be good to go there, and when you got married there it was forever. He taught us by the things he prayed for in our family prayers when we knelt by our chairs before breakfast and again at dinner time. . . .

“Today his teachings not only lift and sustain his descendants but countless numbers of faithful members of the Church as well. What a great privilege and blessing it has been to be his daughter.”⁵

Teachings of Joseph Fielding Smith



To withstand the influence of the adversary, parents must bring up their children in light and truth.

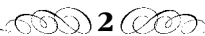
The importance of family unity—love and consideration for one another in the family—cannot be overemphasized. Spiritual solidarity in family relationships is the sure foundation upon which the Church and society itself will flourish. This fact is well known

and appreciated by the adversary, and as never before, he is using every clever device, influence, and power within his control to undermine and destroy this eternal institution. Only the gospel of Jesus Christ applied in family relationships will thwart this devilish destructiveness.⁶

There are many great and real dangers to be reckoned with, and those which concern us more than all others combined have to do with our children. The only real protection or adequate defense can be afforded by the home and its influences.⁷

Our children will have to be taught to discern between good and evil, otherwise in many respects they will not be able to understand why they are not permitted to indulge in practices that are common with their neighbors. Unless they are instructed in the doctrines of the Church, they will not, perhaps, understand why there is any harm in the Sunday concert, a Sunday theatre, picture show, ball game, or something of that kind, when their playmates, without restraint and with encouragement, indulge in these things forbidden of the Lord on his holy day. The parents are responsible for the proper teaching of their children, [and] the Lord will condemn the parents if their children grow up outside of the influence of the principles of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁸

The Lord has commanded us, one and all, to bring our children up in light and truth. Where this spirit exists, disharmony, disobedience, and neglect of sacred duties will not, cannot, succeed.⁹



**Parents are primarily responsible for
the teaching of their children.**

The Father has never relinquished his claim upon the children born into this world. They are still His children. He has placed them in the care of mortal parents with the admonition that they be brought up in light and truth. The primary responsibility, and fundamentally so, is upon the parents to teach their children in light and truth.¹⁰

The first duty pertaining to the training of the children of the Church belongs in the home. It is the responsibility of the parents to

bring up their children in light and truth, and the Lord has declared that wherein they fail to do it, they will stand before the judgment seat to give answer.¹¹

The Lord said in a revelation given to the Church in 1831:

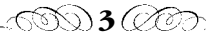
“And again, inasmuch as parents have children in Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized, that teach them not to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, when eight years old, the sin be upon the heads of the parents.

“For this shall be a law unto the inhabitants of Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized.” [D&C 68:25–26.]

. . . The Lord requires this at our hands.¹²

Parents will be responsible for the actions of their children, if they have failed to teach their children by example and by precept.

If parents have done all in their power to teach their children correctly by example and precept and the children then go astray, the parents will not be held responsible and the sin will be upon the children.¹³



The Church helps parents in their efforts to teach their children.

The chief responsibility to do [the] things which lead to salvation rests with each individual. All of us have been placed on earth to undergo the testing experiences of mortality. We are here to see if we will keep the commandments and overcome the world, and we must do all that we can for ourselves.

The next responsibility for our salvation rests with our families. Parents are set to be lights and guides to their children and are commanded to bring them up in light and truth, teaching them the gospel and setting proper examples. Children are expected to obey their parents, and to honor and respect them.

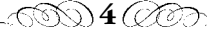
The Church and its agencies constitute in effect a service organization to help the family and the individual.¹⁴



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I appeal to you, my dear brethren and sisters, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, to take advantage of every opportunity the Church affords to have your children trained in the various organizations provided for them by the revelations of the Lord: the Primary, the Sunday School, the Mutual Improvement organizations [Young Men and Young Women], and the quorums of the Lesser Priesthood under the direction of our bishoprics. . . .

. . . We have throughout the Church, wherever it is possible for us to have this opportunity, seminaries and institutes. . . . Brethren and sisters, send your children to these seminaries. Those who are going to college will be old enough, if they have the proper training in their youth, to attend the institutes of the Church.¹⁵



Parents should do all they can to help their children understand and live the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Individual, personal testimony is and always will be the strength of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. A testimony is best nurtured in the family setting. . . . The gaining and the keeping of testimonies should be a family project. Do not neglect anything that will help to strengthen the testimony of any member of your family.¹⁶

We must shelter [children] from the sins and evils of the world as much as we can so they will not be led away from paths of truth and righteousness.¹⁷

Help your children in every way you can to grow up with a knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Teach them to pray. Teach them to observe the Word of Wisdom, to walk faithfully and humbly before the Lord so that when they grow up to manhood and womanhood they can thank you for what you have done for them and look back over their lives with grateful hearts and with love for their parents for the manner in which those parents cared for them and trained them in the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹⁸

Set a righteous example

We ask parents to set an example of righteousness in their own lives and to gather their children around them and teach them the gospel, in their home evenings and at other times.¹⁹

Parents must try to be, or at least put forth their best efforts to be, what they wish the children to be. It is impossible for you to be an example of what you are not.²⁰

You are to teach by example as well as precept. You are to kneel with your children in prayer. You are to teach them, in all humility, of the mission of our Savior, Jesus Christ. You have to show them the way, and the father who shows his son the way will not say to him: “Son, go to Sunday School, or go to Mutual, or go to the priesthood meeting,” but he will say: “Come and go with me.” He will teach by example.²¹

Begin teaching children when they are young

No person can begin too early to serve the Lord. . . . Young people follow the teaching of their parents. The child who is taught in righteousness from birth will most likely follow righteousness always. Good habits are easily formed and easily followed.²²

There should be prayer and faith and love and obedience to God in the home. It is the duty of parents to teach their children these saving principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ, so that they will know why they are to be baptized and that they may be impressed in their hearts with a desire to continue to keep the commandments of God after they are baptized, that they may come back into his presence. Do you, my good brethren and sisters, want your families, your children; do you want to be sealed to your fathers and to your mothers before you, do you want to have this family unit perfect when you, if you are permitted, shall enter the celestial kingdom of God? If so, then you must begin by teaching at the cradle-side.²³

Teach children to pray

What is a home without the spirit of prayer? It is not a Latter-day Saint home. We should pray; we ought not to let a morning pass without thanking the Lord on our knees in the family circle, thanking Him for His blessings and asking for His guidance. We should not let the night pass away, should not retire until we have assembled the members of that family again and thanked the Lord for His protection, and asked for His guidance every day of our lives.²⁴

I hope that you are teaching your children in your homes to pray. I hope that you are having family prayers, morning and evening, that your children are taught by example and by precept to observe the commandments that are so precious and so sacred and mean so much to our salvation in the kingdom of God.²⁵

Introduce children to the scriptures

There is not a home in any part of the world where the Bible should not be found. There is not a home in which the Book of Mormon should not be found. I am speaking of Latter-day Saint homes. There is no home where the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price should not be. Don't keep them on the

shelves or in the cupboard, but opened where they can easily be reached, that the members of the family might find access to them and sit down and read and study the principles of the gospel for themselves.²⁶

Hold family home evening

Children who grow up in homes where they have participated in family home evenings, where love and unity abound, build solid foundations for sound citizenship and for active Church participation. There is no greater legacy that parents can leave to their children than the memory and blessings of a happy, unified, and loving home.

Well-planned family home evenings can be a source of long-lasting joy and influence. These evenings are times for group activity, for organizing, for the expressions of love, for the bearing of testimony, for learning gospel principles, for family fun and recreation, and of all things, for family unity and solidarity.

Fathers and mothers who faithfully hold family home evenings and who build family unity in every way possible, fulfill with honor the greatest of all responsibilities—that of parenthood.²⁷

Fathers can provide no greater leadership in the kingdom of God than to lead their families in holding family home evenings. When such experiences are a part of home life there builds up a unity and family respect which influence each person toward increased righteousness and happiness.²⁸

Parents who ignore the great help of this program [family home evening] are gambling with the future of their children.²⁹

Teach virtue, chastity, and morality

You should teach your children virtue, chastity, and they should be taught from their early childhood. And they should be made aware of the pitfalls and the dangers that are so prevalent throughout the world.³⁰

We have great concern for the spiritual and moral welfare of all youth everywhere. Morality, chastity, virtue, freedom from sin—these are and must be basic to our way of life, if we are to realize its full purpose.

We plead with fathers and mothers to teach personal purity by precept and example and to counsel with their children in all such things. . . .

We have confidence in the young and rising generation in the Church and plead with them not to follow the fashions and customs of the world, not to partake of a spirit of rebellion, not to forsake the paths of truth and virtue. We believe in their fundamental goodness and expect them to become pillars of righteousness and to carry on the work of the Church with increasing faith and effectiveness.³¹

*Prepare children to be witnesses of
the truth and to serve missions*

Our young people are among the most blessed and favored of our Father's children. They are the nobility of heaven, a choice and chosen generation who have a divine destiny. Their spirits have been reserved to come forth in this day when the gospel is on earth, and when the Lord needs valiant servants to carry on his great latter-day work.³²

We must prepare [children] to be living witnesses of the truth and divinity of this great latter-day work, and particularly in the case of our sons, see that they are worthy and qualified to go on missions to preach the gospel to our Father's other children.³³

Help children prepare to have eternal families of their own

Are you training [your children] so that when they are married they will want to go to the house of the Lord? Are you teaching them so that they will want to receive the great endowment which the Lord has in store for them? Have you impressed upon them the fact that they can be sealed as husbands and wives and have bestowed upon them every gift and every blessing that pertains to the celestial kingdom?³⁴

We must . . . so guide and lead [children] that they will choose proper companions and marry in the house of the Lord and thus become inheritors of all the great blessings of which we have been talking.³⁵

Let us try humbly to keep our families intact, to keep them under the influence of the Spirit of the Lord, trained in the principles of the gospel that they may grow up in righteousness and truth. . . . [Children] are given unto us that we might train them in the ways of life, eternal life, that they might come back again into the presence of God, their Father.³⁶

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Questions

- In “From the Life of Joseph Fielding Smith,” note the examples of parents showing love for their children. Think of ways you can follow these examples, regardless of your family responsibilities. How can parents organize themselves to be able to spend more time with their children?
- President Smith mentioned spiritual dangers that existed during his lifetime (see section 1). What are some additional dangers that exist today? How can parents and grandparents help children withstand these influences?
- Consider the trust Heavenly Father places in parents when He allows them to care for His children (see section 2). What guidance and help does He offer?
- In what ways is the Church “a service organization to help the family and the individual”? (See section 3.) How have Church organizations helped you and your family? What can we do to help children and youth participate fully?
- Section 4 lists several ways to help children and youth live the gospel. As you review the counsel, consider the following questions: What are some things you and your family are doing well? In what ways might you improve? What can you do to help the youth of the Church strengthen their testimonies?

Related Scriptures

Deuteronomy 6:1–7; Psalm 132:12; Mosiah 1:4; 4:14–15; D&C 68:25–28; 93:36–40; see also “The Family: A Proclamation to the World”

Teaching Help

“Be careful not to end good discussions too soon in an attempt to present all the material you have prepared. Although it is important to cover the material, it is more important to help learners feel the influence of the Spirit, resolve their questions, increase their understanding of the gospel, and deepen their commitment to keep the commandments.” However, it is also “important to end discussions at the right time. Much of the spirit of an uplifting discussion is lost when it lasts too long. . . . Manage the time. Know when the lesson should end. Give yourself enough time to summarize what has been said and to bear your testimony” (*Teaching, No Greater Call* [1999], 64, 65).

Notes

1. In Joseph Fielding Smith Jr. and John J. Stewart, *The Life of Joseph Fielding Smith* (1972), 40.
2. In *The Life of Joseph Fielding Smith*, 40.
3. In Bryant S. Hinckley, “Joseph Fielding Smith,” *Improvement Era*, June 1932, 459.
4. In *The Life of Joseph Fielding Smith*, 56.
5. Amelia Smith McConkie, “Joseph Fielding Smith,” *Church News*, Oct. 30, 1993, 8, 10.
6. Message from the First Presidency, in *Family Home Evenings 1970–71* (family home evening lesson manual, 1970), v.
7. “Our Children—“The Loveliest Flowers From God’s Own Garden,”” *Relief Society Magazine*, Jan. 1969, 5.
8. In Conference Report, Oct. 1916, 71–72.
9. In Conference Report, Apr. 1965, 11.
10. “The Sunday School’s Responsibility,” *Instructor*, May 1949, 206; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, ed. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (1954–56), 1:316.
11. *Take Heed to Yourselves!* (1966), 221.
12. In Conference Report, Apr. 1958, 29–30.
13. Personal correspondence, quoted in *Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:316; italics removed.
14. “Use the Programs of the Church,” *Improvement Era*, Oct. 1970, 3.
15. In Conference Report, Apr. 1958, 29–30.
16. “The Old and the New Magazines,” *Improvement Era*, Nov. 1970, 11.
17. “Mothers in Israel,” *Relief Society Magazine*, Dec. 1970, 886.
18. In Conference Report, Apr. 1958, 30.
19. In Conference Report, Apr. 1970, 6.
20. “Our Children—“The Loveliest Flowers From God’s Own Garden,”” 6.
21. In Conference Report, Oct. 1948, 153.
22. *Take Heed to Yourselves!* 414.
23. In Conference Report, Oct. 1948, 153.
24. “How to Teach the Gospel at Home,” *Relief Society Magazine*, Dec. 1931, 685.
25. In Conference Report, Apr. 1958, 29.
26. “Keeping the Commandments of Our Eternal Father,” *Relief Society Magazine*, Dec. 1966, 884.
27. Message from the First Presidency, in *Family Home Evenings 1970–71*, v.
28. Message from the First Presidency, in *Family Home Evenings* (family home evening lesson manual, 1971), 4.
29. In “Message from the First Presidency,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1971, 1.
30. “Teach Virtue and Modesty,” *Relief Society Magazine*, Jan. 1963, 5.
31. In Conference Report, Apr. 1970, 5–6.
32. In Conference Report, Apr. 1970, 6.
33. “Mothers in Israel,” 886.
34. In Conference Report, Oct. 1948, 154.
35. “Mothers in Israel,” 886.
36. In Conference Report, Apr. 1958, 30.