

## President Ezra Taft Benson

### Great things required of fathers

When the Lord declared that "power is not given unto Satan to tempt little children, until they begin to become accountable," He revealed that this period of childhood and unaccountability was given to children so that "great things may be required at the hand of their fathers." (See D&C 29:47-48.)

"That great things may be required at the hand of their fathers"! What confidence the Lord has in fathers, and what a responsibility He has placed on fathers! Great things are required of fathers today.

When I think of fathers, I think of Adam—progenitor of us all—who faithfully taught his posterity in the ways of righteousness. I think of father Abraham, whose faith knows no peer among mortal fathers. I esteem Jacob, or Israel, with a feeling akin to reverence for his diligence and long-suffering. I honor the name of Lehi for the example he gave to his sons.

In this dispensation, I think of Joseph Smith, Sr., first to give credence to his prophet-son's testimony. I think of the noble example of Joseph F. Smith, sixth President of the Church and father of the tenth President.

I revere these noble men—not just because they were great prophets, but because they were great fathers, who realized what the Lord required of them, and they lived up to that expectation.

I wish to speak on this occasion to you fathers about three particular things that the Lord requires of us. These are things that every father with an ordinary amount of diligence may do. If we will do them, our homes will be blessed with peace, our names will be proudly borne by our descendants, and our association with our family may be eternal.

Fathers, what great things does the Lord require of us?

### Influence for good in the home

*First, provide a home where love and the Spirit of the Lord may abide.* Children are born innocent, not evil. They are not sent to earth, however, to neutral environments. They are sent to homes that, for good or evil, influence their ideas, emotions, thoughts, and standards, by which future choices will be made.

One great thing the Lord requires of each of us is to provide a home where a happy, positive influence for good exists. In future years the costliness of home furnishings or the number of bathrooms will not matter much, but what will matter significantly is whether our children felt love and acceptance in the home. It will greatly matter whether there was happiness and laughter, or bickering and contention.

I am convinced that before a child can be influenced for good by his or her parents, there must be a demonstration of respect and love.

President Joseph F. Smith said: "Fathers, if you wish your children to be taught in the principles of the gospel, . . . if you wish them to be obedient and united with you, love them! and prove to them that you do love them by your every word or act to them. For your own sake, for the love that should exist between you and your boys—however wayward they might be, . . . when you speak or talk to them, do it not in anger; do it not harshly, in a condemning spirit. Speak to them kindly; get down and weep with them, if necessary, and get them to shed tears with you if possible. Soften their hearts; get them to feel tenderly towards you. Use no lash and no violence,

but . . . approach them with reason, with persuasion and love unfeigned. With this means, if you cannot gain your boys and your girls, . . . there will be no means left in the world by which you can win them to yourselves." (*Liahona, The Elders' Journal*, 17 Oct. 1911, pp. 260-61.)

Many suggestions could be enumerated as to what we can and should do to make our homes places of refuge and happiness. I believe, however, that to tell a man what is expected of him is more important than to prescribe exactly how he is to get the job done.

Once you determine that a high priority in your life is to see that your wife and your children are happy, then you will do all in your power to do so. I am not just speaking of satisfying material desires, but of filling other vital needs such as appreciation, compliments, comforting, encouraging, listening, and giving love and affection.

*If with pleasure you are viewing  
Anything your child is doing,  
If you like him, if you love him,  
Let him know.*

*Don't withhold appreciation  
Until others give expression—  
If he wins your commendation  
Tell him so.*

*More than fame and more than  
money  
Is a disposition sunny,  
And some hearty warm approval  
Makes one glad.*

*So if you think some praise is due  
him,  
Now's the time to give it to him;  
Tie him close with loving language  
From his dad.*

Your supreme opportunity in life is fatherhood! These words directed to fathers by President David O. McKay should be framed by every father:

"When one puts businesses or

pleasure, or the earning of additional income, above his home, he that moment starts on the downgrade to soul weakness. When the club becomes more attractive to any man than his home, it is time for him to confess in bitter shame that he has failed to measure up to the supreme opportunity of his life, and flunked in the final test of true manhood.

"The poorest shack in which love prevails over a united family is of far greater value to God and future humanity than any other riches. In such a home God can work miracles, and will work miracles. Pure hearts in a pure home are always in whispering distance of Heaven." (*Church News*, 7 Sept. 1968, p. 4.)

Fathers, what is the spirit in your homes?

### Lead your children to Christ

*Second, teach your children to understand principles of truth.* In a revelation to the Prophet Joseph, the Lord directed fathers to bring up their children in light and truth. He rebuked several because of their failure to do so. Each of us would do well to review those principles given in section 93 to Joseph Smith, Jr., Frederick G. Williams, Sidney Rigdon, and Newel K. Whitney.

In this revelation the Lord states that Satan "cometh and taketh away light and truth, through disobedience, from the children of men, and because of the tradition of their fathers." (D&C 93:39.) The "tradition of their fathers" refers, of course, to the bad examples and teachings of fathers.

We must remember this world is a telestial environment. Our children grow up in this environment. They are constantly exposed to television programs and movie entertainment which depict the most seamy and perverse side of life. They are bargaged with slogans and advertising designed to induce them to practices

that rob them of spirituality. Even some textbooks and teaching aids used in our public school systems present theory and, in some instances, falsehood as truth.

Some fathers leave solely to the mother or to the school the responsibility of shaping a child's ideas and standards. Too often television and movie screens shape our children's values.

We should not assume that public schools always reinforce teachings given in the home concerning ethical and moral conduct. We have seen introduced into many school systems false ideas about the theory of man's development from lower forms of life, teachings that there are no absolute moral values, repudiation of all beliefs regarded as supernatural, permissiveness about sexual freedom that gives sanction to immoral behavior and "alternative life-styles" such as lesbianism, homosexuality, and other perverse practices.

Such teachings not only tend to undermine the faith and morals of our young people, but they deny the existence of God, who gave absolute laws, and the divinity of Jesus Christ. Surely we can see the moral contradiction of some who argue for the preservation of endangered species, but sanction the abortion of unborn humans.

There is a solution, and it is that the Lord expects great things from the fathers of Israel. Fathers must take time to find out what their children are being taught and then take steps to correct false information and teaching.

I know fathers who inquire of their children each evening to determine firsthand what their children are being taught in school and what needs to be corrected. Then, if necessary, they instruct them in what the Lord has revealed. This is application of the principle that "light and truth forsake that evil one." (D&C 93:37.)

The new consolidated Sunday

meeting schedule has been implemented to give fathers more time on the Sabbath to teach their children. This is a golden opportunity for families to study the scriptures and receive instruction from their parents. Blessed is the household that does this on a consistent basis.

What should we teach? The Lord has revealed the specific curriculum that parents should teach. Hear His words: "Teach . . . unto your children, that all men, everywhere, must repent, or they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God, for no unclean thing can dwell there, or dwell in his presence." (Moses 6:57.)

As further noted in this revelation, the fundamental doctrines consist of the doctrine of the Fall, the mission of Christ and His atonement, and the first principles and ordinances of the gospel, which include faith in Christ, repentance, baptism for the remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Ghost as the means to a sanctified life (see Moses 6:58-59).

Brethren, we are to teach the fundamental doctrines of the Church in such a way that our children may understand. Some fathers teach, but their children do not understand. This places responsibility on fathers to study and learn the gospel.

With few exceptions, righteous sons and daughters who have attained eternal blessings are not just physically begotten by their fathers. They are spiritually regenerated by the examples and teachings of their fathers.

Great fathers lead their children to Christ.

### Set your household in order

*Third, set in order your own household.* Such was the Lord's counsel to fathers in early Church history, and such is His timely counsel to us today!

Setting your home in order is keeping the commandments of God.

This brings harmony and love in the home between you and your companion and between you and your children. It is daily family prayer. It is teaching your family to understand the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is each family member keeping the commandments of God. It is you and your companion being worthy to receive a temple recommend, all family members receiving the ordinances of exaltation, and your family being sealed together for eternity. It is being free from excessive debt, with family members paying honest tithes and offerings.

Fathers, are your homes in order?

In a revelation given to President John Taylor, the Lord directed this message to the priesthood: "I call upon the heads of families to put their houses in order according to the law of God, . . . and to purify themselves before me, and to purge out iniquity from their households. And I will bless and be with you, saith the Lord, and ye shall gather together in your holy places wherein ye assemble to call upon me, and ye shall ask for such things as are right, and I will hear your prayers, and my Spirit and power shall be with you, and my blessing shall rest upon you, upon your families, your dwellings and your households, upon your flocks and herds and fields, your orchards and vineyards, and upon all that pertains to you; and you shall be my people and I will be your God; . . . for my word shall go forth, and my work shall be accomplished, and my Zion shall be established." (*Revelation given through President John Taylor, at Salt Lake City, Utah Territory, October 13th, 1882, typeset ms. in Church Historical Department Archives, pp. 2-3.*)

### Sacred title of "father"

Yes, these times require great things from fathers, and so does the

Lord. Three requirements are: create a home where love and the Spirit of the Lord may abide; bring up children in light and truth; and set your homes in order.

The sacred title of "father" is shared with the Almighty. In the Church men are called and released. Did you ever hear of a mortal father being released?

As I travel throughout the Church and see faithful families, I say, "Thank God for exemplary fathers and mothers." As I see faithful young people and am proud of their accomplishments, I say, "Thank God for diligent fathers and mothers."

Fatherhood is not a matter of station or wealth; it is a matter of desire, diligence, and determination to see one's family exalted in the celestial kingdom. If that prize is lost, nothing else really matters.

I know of one family who has as its goal that each member of the family and posterity will arrive in their heavenly home—the celestial kingdom—with no vacant chairs. That is their objective. They review it at every family reunion and mention it frequently as they mingle together between reunions.

God bless all the fathers in Israel to do well the work within the walls of our own homes. With the Lord's help we shall succeed in this, our most important responsibility. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### President Romney

President Ezra Taft Benson, President of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, has just addressed us.

We shall now hear from Bishop Victor L. Brown, Presiding Bishop of the Church. He will be followed by Elder David B. Haight, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles.