

# Strengthening the Family

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Near the shores of Galilee, as the resurrected Christ dined with his disciples on a fresh catch of fish, he asked of Simon Peter: “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs” (John 21:15).

Do our worldly pursuits take precedence over our eternal objectives? Would we respond as Peter did when he was questioned about his priorities?

My beloved sisters, my message to you this hour is one of love and encouragement, that we, as women, can demonstrate our love of the Lord through fulfilling our God-given responsibility to “feed his lambs” by bringing souls unto him and by strengthening the family both here and hereafter.

It is a glorious thing to be a woman in these latter days. We, together with the priesthood, are to prepare a righteous generation for the second coming of Christ. We are led by a living prophet who counsels us to feed the lambs, enrich and protect the home, and strengthen the family.

Why do you think the prophets are reminding us of our sacred duty to feed the lambs and protect the home and family? Because it is against the home and family that Satan has aimed his greatest efforts to destroy, and far too many sheep are wandering or being enticed away out of the sheep fold, and wolves lie in wait to devour the flock.

How can we help prepare children for their significant role if we, their mentors, are absent or uncaring? It is an awesome task, but one filled with hope and happiness, if we make it so.

Let’s take an expanded look at the eternal family. We all lived with our Father in Heaven before this earth life. The scriptures say we received our “first lessons in the world of spirits and were prepared to come forth in the due time of the Lord to labor in his vineyard for the salvation of the souls of men” (D&C 138:56).

In the premortal existence, our heavenly family was a prototype for us to follow in guiding our families here on earth. We were prepared to come to an earthly family, where we could learn again sacred truths we had learned before.

Parents are their children’s first and most influential teachers. The responsibility of teaching proper values and sacred truths cannot be successfully delegated to anyone else. We must remember the sanctity of these children; they do not belong to us; they are children of our Father—his spirit children come to earth.

There is a story of a group of Relief Society sisters making candy called “divinity” at the home of one of the sisters. Two little boys in the family were allowed to eat all of the divinity they could scrape from the spoons, pans, and bowls. It was the weekend of general conference and, as the family listened to the talks one of the speakers said, “There is a spark of divinity in each of us.” One of the little boys jumped up and said, “A spark of divinity? Wow, I’m full of it!”

Yes, children are full of divinity. Surely the angels attend them. But the loving care and teachings they need in order to abide on the earth must be given by mothers and fathers and those who influence them. They need to be

loved, and they need to be taught. The risen Lord reiterated the counsel of Isaiah when he said, “And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children” (3 Ne. 22:13).

If we love the Lord, we will “feed his lambs.” But how? He has given us resources that will guide us through this brief mortal existence back to our heavenly home.

The principle is illustrated in an experience that some members of our family had when we were in a very large city. Because of differences in work and school schedules, we had to book separate flights from two different airlines. Some of the family left from one airport, but my son and I were scheduled to leave from an airport south of town, nearly two hours away. There were challenges ahead: motoring on the opposite side of the road from that to which we were accustomed, congested highways, road repairs, as well as a limited time to catch the plane. We felt a dependence on the Lord as we began our journey. With road map in hand, I tried to navigate (which is not my forte), and my son tried his hand at the wheel of a rented car. I earnestly hoped that the people who had made the maps had designed them to match the road signs. We were not in a position to make a mistake or backtrack, or our destination would not be realized.

How like life, I thought: If we rely on the Lord, follow the map, and watch the road signs, without making a lot of unnecessary detours, we can navigate through mortality and reach our destination safely, in the Lord’s due time. Decisions determine destiny.

What are some of the road signs or guides that help us through this earthly life?

- • A living prophet, who speaks the mind and will of God;
- • Prayer, whereby we can speak to God and be directed by the Holy Spirit;
- • The scriptures, wherein God speaks to us;
- • The priesthood, with power to act for God; and
- • Sacred covenants and ordinances, which offer us family life with our Heavenly Father forever.

“The home is the basis of a righteous life,” said President David O. McKay (*Stepping Stones to an Abundant Life*, comp. Llewelyn R. McKay, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1971, p. 276). It is the place to teach the vision of eternity to our families and to help them follow the road signs in order to reach their destiny. Women hold a key role in teaching these truths, so we need to be knowledgeable and full of faith. When we are firm in our own convictions, we can give our inner strength to those about us with confidence. We are responsible for our personal development that will give us this confidence.

True personal worth comes from a secure relationship with Heavenly Father. Individual worth is intrinsic, it is internal; it is eternal. It is something that cannot be taken from us when the blossom of youth fades, when economic conditions leave us desolate, when sickness or handicaps befall us, or when prominence and visibility are obscured.

Many are led astray by the false doctrines of the world that youthfulness, beauty, adornments, possessions, power, titles, or attainments are what make one worthwhile. As in Book of Mormon times, there are those who want to become popular in the eyes of the world rather than do what God expects. The Lord counseled Joseph Smith early in his ministry, “You should not have feared man more than God” (D&C 3:7).

How can we build a secure relationship with Heavenly Father? Again, we can refer to the guides and road signs we have been given to direct us through life: fervent prayer, being directed by the Holy Spirit, and searching the scriptures daily, all of which help us live virtuous lives. “Then,” say the scriptures, “shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God” (D&C 121:45).

A woman’s inner strength is important in the husband-and-wife relationship. As husbands and wives work together in righteousness, loving and appreciating each other, the family is fortified in countless ways.

President Ezra Taft Benson spoke to the fathers and husbands at a fireside for parents and said, “We look to you to give righteous leadership in your home and families and, with your companions and the mothers of your children, to lead your families back to our Eternal Father” (*To the Mothers in Zion*, Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1987, p. 13).

This righteous leadership is enhanced by the priesthood power that was restored to earth to bless and direct us. How can we, as women, receive the full blessings and power of the priesthood in our lives? We can sustain and support those who bear it righteously. This is by divine design, not by plan of man.

I know a woman with several small children whose husband served in a time-consuming Church calling. He often came home late from work—just long enough to say hello—then off he went to perform his Church duties. The children sometimes had to be reassured, and sometimes the mother had to reassure herself, by saying, “Aren’t we glad that Daddy is worthy to serve Heavenly Father so we can receive so many blessings?” A support instead of a murmur brought results that had a lasting influence on that home and family.

An important part of the plan for continued family relationships is to receive ordinances and covenants in the holy temples for ourselves and our ancestors. These ordinances and covenants are an anchor to safety for the family, both here and hereafter. Each of us belongs to a family and has ancestors who really belong to us. Should we not be about seeking after these loved ones and performing temple work that will seal them to us in eternal families?

Elder John A. Widtsoe spoke from his own experience when he said, “Whoever seeks to help those on the other side receives help in return in all the affairs of life” (*The Forefather Quest*, Salt Lake City: Genealogical Society of Utah, 1937, p. 22).

When I was a young girl, a group of us were invited to Elder Widtsoe’s home for a fireside, and afterward he showed us his pedigree chart, a result of devoted research. As he unrolled the chart, it stretched across three rooms of his house. This was so impressive to our young minds that it motivated us to begin searching for information about our own ancestors. What a wonderful beginning to a lifelong interest and participation in this sacred work! A spiritual dimension is truly added to our lives when we work on our family histories.

Sisters in Zion, could there be a more rewarding calling than to labor in the Lord’s vineyard for the salvation of souls? We have the choice privilege of strengthening families and influencing those who have been placed in our care, as well as those who have preceded us beyond the veil. Lest we think the task is too hard, be reminded that angels will be round about us to bear us up if we are willing to do our part. The promised blessings are almost more than we can imagine.

We have been blessed by a prophet of God in our day as he said: “We pray for you. We sustain you. We honor you

as you bear, nourish, train, teach, and love for eternity. I promise you the blessings of heaven and ‘all that [the] Father hath’ (see D&C 84:38) as you magnify the noblest calling of all” (Benson, *To the Mothers in Zion*, p. 13).

I love being a mother, a wife, a daughter, a sister, a woman in these latter days. The Lord knows us and loves each of us and desires to bless us in our important work. We must be willing to come unto him; to accept his will over our own wants; to bring souls unto him; to feed his lambs and his sheep, so that at that great day when we meet him face to face he will say, “Come unto me ye blessed, for behold, your works have been the works of righteousness” (Alma 5:16).

I bear you my witness that the Lord lives, and I pray that we may eagerly fulfill our sacred responsibility to strengthen families both here and hereafter. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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