

Be Thou an Example

Ruth B. Wright

The best conversations happen around our kitchen table. Many times we have laughed; cried; shared feelings, hopes, and dreams; sorted out differences; solved the problems of the world; and recognized our strengths and weaknesses into the wee hours of the morning.

I suppose that some of you are asking, “What does the Wright family’s kitchen table have to do with this talk?” Nothing! I just wish we all could be surrounding it right now. It certainly would be more comfortable for me. Then we could reflect with one another, share our ideas and feelings, and come to some conclusions together. Since we can’t do that, I invite you to mentally sit at my kitchen table as I share with you some of my thoughts and ideas.

I am grateful for the beautiful message we have just heard from the choir. I too feel our Savior’s love. His spirit warms my soul. I have been encircled with his love and recognize the blessings he has given me. It is my desire to follow him as I strive to serve him.

One way we can feel Christ’s love is through the example of others as they emulate his life. My grandfather Broadbent was such a man. He taught by example. He never sent his ten children out to work without his working with them, side by side.

He showed my father how to dig postholes by making a game of it. They would race with one another to see who could finish the task first. He subscribed to the principle that once a job was begun, it was done well, and it was finished. Not only did he work hard, he was committed to living the gospel well. He accepted the gospel plan without question. When it was time for tithing settlement, the whole family attended and accounted for their increase. He sent his sons on missions when there was no money during the Depression. He loved the Lord and his word. I remember countless times as a teenager visiting him in his home. There I would see him seated in his black leather chair reading the scriptures.

He was devoted to his family and loved to have us meet together often. At the end of these family gatherings he would call us together and talk with us. No matter what else he said, he always told us the most important things in life were the family and the gospel. He bore a strong witness of the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, told us that he loved us and that Heavenly Father loved us, too. There was no doubt in my mind he was telling us the truth. His legacy has been perpetuated. Although he died before I was married, my children know him as a man who loved the Lord.

When I was a young child, my grandmother Richards lived in the upstairs bedroom of our home. Although she was in her nineties and failing in health, her mind was alert, and her hands spent most of the day crocheting trim around flannel baby blankets. Grandma was such a part of our lives that I can’t ever remember her not being in our home. She was very patient. My younger brother, Rich, and I spent many hours taking Grandma “for pretend rides” in her hospital bed. The crank at the foot of the bed could be rotated so that the head or the foot could be raised or lowered. When she was resting, we would come into her room and ask her if we could crank her up or down. Once, when we tired of this game, we ran off to play, leaving Grandma with both her head and

her feet in the air in a “V” position.

She never scolded us for doing this, nor would she allow our mother to, either. She understood that we were children. She simply picked up the gold bell by her side and rang it until one of our older sisters or parents came to her rescue.

Every evening, rocking in her chair, she would call us to her side and ask that we say our prayers with her. She taught us a sweet little verse which we would repeat: “Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.” Afterward we offered our individual prayers to Heavenly Father. She would listen carefully and tell us that she loved us. Through her example, she taught me about patience. She taught me about prayer. She taught me about love.

In Timothy, we are admonished to be an example of the believers. (See 1 Tim. 4:12.) A believer is someone who follows and knows the teachings of Christ not only in his mind but also in his heart and whose actions are a witness of that belief. It isn't easy to be an example of the believers. We don't usually wake up in the morning and say, “Today I'm going to be an example of the believers!” Yet we can say, “Today I will be kind and thoughtful, or considerate, or honest, or whatever quality I need to work on.” And *then* we will try hard all day to make a conscious effort to do so. That we can do!

We can live in such a way that people can look to us as their examples.

To be a good example of a principle, we must not only understand it but we must live that principle. It should become such a part of our everyday living that without consciously thinking about it, the principle is reflected in the way we live.

Children are especially sensitive to the power of pure example. Ten-year-old Andrea stood at the pulpit. Her dark eyes looked around the room. She took a deep breath and began, “I would like to tell you about some people that I love.

“I love my older sister, Amy. She is always happy and cheerful. She encourages me when things are hard. I like the way Amy is kind to her friends. She is a good big sister.

“My aunt Elaine is a cheerful mother. She wants everyone to be happy. She shows concern and love for others. I want to be just like her.

“Grandma always has time for me. She listens when I talk to her. She is kind and loving and always wants to make things fair.”

Andrea's sister, aunt, and grandmother each lived Christlike principles in such a way that Andrea was drawn to them. She felt cherished and loved when she was with them; therefore, she wanted to be like them.

I believe we are drawn to those who make us feel good about ourselves when we are with them. The desire to be like them follows naturally.

To be true examples of believers, we are first committed inwardly to the principle of Christ that our actions reflect. For example, if we are dedicated to the principle of family prayer, we as parents pray regularly with our family. Hopefully, our children will recognize our devotion and dependence on prayer and pattern their prayers after this example.

The song “Love Is Spoken Here” shows the strength of a mother’s prayer as seen by her child.

*I see my mother kneeling with our family each day.
I hear the words she whispers as she bows her head to pray.
Her plea to the Father quiets all my fears,
And I am thankful love is spoken here.*

Because of a mother’s example, a child feels at peace while participating in family prayer.

It is interesting to note that we choose the examples we follow. We exercise our own agency through our choices. Examples are not forced upon us. We choose which ones we want to emulate and which ones we want to ignore or disregard. The choice is ours, and so is the burden of the consequence.

Throughout the beginning pages of the Book of Mormon, we are reminded that Nephi believed the words of his father and used his agency to follow Lehi’s righteous example. Laman and Lemuel thought their father was foolish; they rebelled and murmured against him. They chose not to follow their father’s teachings. The results of Nephi, Laman, and Lemuel’s decisions are evident. Nephi was blessed with the Spirit of the Lord. Laman and Lemuel lived lives of despair. And yet the decision was theirs, to choose for themselves.

Our beloved prophet, Ezra Taft Benson, a living example of the believers, said, “The proper example is all-important. *Let us be what we profess to be.* There is no satisfactory substitute.” (*Improvement Era*, Aug. 1948, p. 494; italics added.)

We can always feel secure in looking to Christ as our perfect example. He showed us by his own life not only what we should do, but also what we are to become. “Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am.” (3 Ne. 27:27.)

Jesus resisted temptations. He treated all equally. He was patient in his teaching yet bold in his condemnation of evil. He forgave the repentant, healed the sick, and served without ceasing.

Among the Nephites, Christ taught many beautiful gospel principles. He instructed them to follow the commandments so they could be happy. He commanded them not to argue or fight but love one another. He taught them how to pray and said, “Behold I am the light; I have set an example for you.” (3 Ne. 18:16.)

Above all, Jesus was the perfect example of love. “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you. ...” (John 13:34.)

One Sunday I was substituting in a Primary class of particularly rambunctious five-year-olds. The lesson was about love. We began by singing the song “Jesus Said Love Everyone.”

Afterward I commented, “Jesus loves everyone, and we must do that, too.”

Robbie challenged me. “Oh, no, he doesn’t love everyone—he doesn’t love the bad people!”

“Yes, Robbie, he loves everyone.”

“He doesn’t love the robbers.”

“Even the robbers.”

Robbie thought a minute and said, “I know some people he didn’t love—he didn’t love the men who killed him!”

At that point I told Robbie about the Crucifixion.

“When Jesus hung on the cross,” Robbie interrupted me, “did they really put nails in his hands and feet?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, that must have hurt.”

“Yes, it did. Even after that happened, as Jesus hung on the cross in great pain, he said, ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.’ (Luke 23:34.) Jesus was speaking about the men who had placed him on the cross. He asked Heavenly Father to forgive them. Yes, Robbie, Jesus even loved these people, and he forgave them.”

Robbie looked at me, furrowed his brow, and said, “I’m going to ask my dad if Jesus really did say that.”

After class was over, I was walking into sacrament meeting with my family, and I felt a tug on my dress. It was Robbie.

“Sister Wright, my dad says you’re right.”

The tenderness of this experience was that Robbie went from challenging the idea that Jesus could love everyone to a sweet trust of Christ’s unconditional love.

Each of us can feel our Savior’s love through the righteous example of others. We, too, can strive to live in such a way that we can be examples of the believers. I testify that Jesus, our Savior, is the Christ, our perfect example, in his name, amen.