

of the knowledge, example, and love of His Father. Likewise, may each of us, as parents and especially as brethren in the priesthood, through our example, love, and care, be remembered by our children to have the qualities that our

Heavenly Father and our Savior have, that we may endure to the end and someday return with our families to their celestial presence, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## Elder Joe J. Christensen

### Rearing children amid moral pollution

Not long ago I had an impromptu conversation with a group of young parents who exhibited a great deal of anxiety about rearing their children in our morally polluted environment. They asked for assistance in helping their children find their way in a world that seems to be unraveling.

We all hear and read a great deal these days about our polluted physical environment—acid rain, smog, toxic wastes. But these parents recognize that there is another kind of pollution that is much more dangerous—the moral and spiritual.

In a recent conference, Elder Boyd K. Packer said, “As we test the *moral* environment, we find the *pollution* index is spiraling upward” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1992, p. 91; or *Ensign*, May 1992, p. 66). The Apostle Paul foresaw “that in the last days perilous times shall come” (2 Timothy 3:1). And speaking of the last days, the prophet Moroni declared, “Yea, it shall come in a day when there shall be great pollutions upon the face of the earth” (Mormon 8:31).

### Pollution in the mass media

Sadly, the effects of this great pollution are perhaps most evident in the mass media, films, television, and popular music. Of this, Senator Robert D. Byrd said, “If we in this nation continue to sow the images of murder, violence, drug abuse, . . . perversion, [and] pornography . . . before the eyes of millions

of children, year after year and day after day, we should not be surprised if the foundations of our society rot away as if from leprosy” (in Michael Medved, *Hollywood vs. America* [New York: Harper Perennial, 1992], p. 194).

Although there are some uplifting exceptions, in most areas of the mass media there seems to be a declaration of war against almost everything the majority treasures most: the family, religion, and patriotism. Marriage is degraded, while premarital and extramarital relations are encouraged and glamorized. Profanity and the foulest of vulgar gutter language bombard the ears of all who listen. Reportedly, in one R-rated movie, the most common, vulgar four-letter word was spoken 256 times! Human life itself is trivialized by the constant barrage of violence and killings. Remember that anything that is not good for children is rarely good for adults.

In an unsuccessful effort to ward off teen pregnancy and social disease, birth control devices are freely distributed. I am convinced that this practice strongly communicates the basic message to many youth that “anything goes; just protect yourself in the process.”

It is no wonder that young parents become very anxious as they attempt to fulfill their sacred trust in the face of such an onslaught of despicable influences. Unfortunately, these challenges confront members of the Church as well as nonmembers.

Parents who really want to receive assistance must return to the basics—

the fundamentals of the gospel. Among all that could be said, here are four specific suggestions that, if applied, can make a positive difference:

### Set clear moral standards

First, *do not be afraid to set clear moral standards and guidelines*. Be sure to say no when it is needed. As Dr. John Rosemond counseled:

"[Give] your children regular, daily doses of Vitamin N. This vital nutrient consists simply of the most character-building two-letter word in the English language: [No]. . . Unfortunately, many, if not most, of today's children suffer from Vitamin N deficiency. They've been overindulged by well-meaning parents who've given them far too much of what they want and far too little of what they truly need" (*John Rosemond's Six-Point Plan for Raising Happy, Healthy Children* [Kansas City, Mo.: Andrews and McMeel, 1989], p. 114).

Even though your children say, "Well, everyone else is going to stay out until one or two in the morning, and their parents don't care. Why can't I? Don't you trust me?" let them know that there are some things that, as members of your family, you simply do not do. Some parents seem to be almost pathologically concerned about their children's popularity and social acceptance and go along with many things that are really against their better judgment, such as expensive fads, immodest clothes, late hours, dating before age sixteen, R-rated movies, and so on. For children and parents, standing up for what is right may be lonely at times. There may be evenings alone, parties missed, and movies which go unseen. It may not always be fun. But parenting is not a popularity contest.

You may need to get together with the parents of your children's friends and mutually agree on more acceptable high standards of entertainment, hours,

and activities. Your children may be frustrated at first, but in the end they will grow to appreciate you even more because you cared enough about them to set some wholesome guidelines and standards.

### Teach children to work

Second, *teach your children to work and to take responsibility*. Especially in urban settings, too many children are growing up in an environment where they do not have enough to do. They are like the young thirteen-year-old boy who was asked what he did all day in the summer.

He said, "Well, I get up in the morning about ten or eleven. Then my mom gets me something to eat. Then maybe I'll go with some of the guys and play a little basketball, maybe watch TV, and then go down to the mall and 'hang out' for a while—sorta watch the girls and stuff."

When asked what time he got to bed, he said, "Oh, usually about one or two o'clock. I go over to a friend's house and watch some videos. It's really neat, because my friend's mom told the guy at the video shop that it was all right for her son to check out any video he wanted—including R-rated."

I feel great concern for the future of that young Latter-day Saint boy as well as for that of his friends.

I like what President Spencer W. Kimball has said on this topic:

"We want you parents to create work for your children. . . .

"The idle generation! Hours each day and nothing to do. . . .

"What can we do?" they ask.

"Do the shopping, work in the hospital, help the neighbors and the church custodian, wash dishes, vacuum the floors, make the beds, get the meals, learn to sew.

"Read good books, . . . clean the house, press your clothes, rake the leaves, shovel the snow, peddle papers."

Then he concludes:

"Lawmakers in their overeagerness to protect the child have legislated until the pendulum has swung to the other extreme. But no law prohibits most work [here] suggested . . . , and parents can make work" (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982], pp. 360–61).

In addition, help your children learn self-discipline by such activities as learning to play a musical instrument or learning another demanding skill. I am reminded of the story of the salesman who came to a house one hot summer day. Through the screen door he could see a young boy practicing his scales on the piano. His baseball glove and hat were by the side of the piano bench. He said, "Say, boy, is your mother home?" To which the boy replied, "What do you think?" Thank heavens for conscientious parents!

Every child should be helped to develop some skill or talent by which he or she can experience success and thus build self-esteem.

Missionaries who have learned to work hard and have developed self-discipline are much more successful.

### Create a spiritual environment

Third, *create an environment in your family in which spiritual experiences can occur*. For example:

- Remember family prayer every day. With schedules as they are, you may need to have more than one prayer. Sending children out of your home without the spiritual protection of prayer is like sending them out into a blizzard without sufficient clothing.

- Hold family home evenings *every week* without fail. This is a wonderful time to share your testimony with your children. Give them an opportunity to share their feelings about the gospel. Help them learn to recognize when they feel the presence of the Spirit. Family

home evenings will help create an island of refuge and security within your own home.

- Read the scriptures together daily as a family. There is real power in the scriptures.

President Benson has said: "May I admonish you to participate in a program of daily reading and pondering of the scriptures. . . . The Book of Mormon will change your life. It will fortify you against the evils of our day. It will bring a spirituality into your life that no other book will" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1986, p. 56; or *Ensign*, May 1986, p. 43).

Is the Book of Mormon a significant part of your reading? Count the number of rich promises President Marion G. Romney made to parents when he said:

"I feel certain that if, in our homes, parents will read from the Book of Mormon prayerfully and regularly, both by themselves and with their children, the spirit of that great book will come to permeate our homes. . . . The spirit of reverence will increase; mutual respect and consideration for each other will grow. The spirit of contention will depart. Parents will counsel their children in greater love and wisdom. Children will be more responsive and submissive to the counsel of their parents. Righteousness will increase. . . . The pure love of Christ . . . will abound in our homes and lives, bringing in their wake peace, joy, and happiness" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1980, p. 90; or *Ensign*, May 1980, p. 67).

We should not take these ten promises lightly.

### Follow the prophets' counsel

Fourth, *follow the counsel of the prophets*. Listen to their messages at this conference and reread their counsel to us from prior occasions. If your personal and family practices do not conform to the counsel received, then, for your own family's sake, make some changes.

President Harold B. Lee said, "We must learn to give heed to the words and commandments that the Lord shall give through his prophet . . . [and quoting from the Doctrine and Covenants] 'as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith.' (D&C 21:4-5.)"

He continued:

"There will be some things that take patience and faith. You may not like what comes from the authority of the Church. It may contradict your political views. It may contradict your social views. It may interfere with some of your social life. . . .

" . . . Your safety and ours depends upon whether or not we follow the ones whom the Lord has placed to preside over his church" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1970, pp. 152-53; or *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1970; pp. 126-27).

From a personal standpoint, of what value is it to have living prophets if we do not heed their counsel?

Fathers and mothers, it is not too late to change. There is still hope. You can begin today to apply these suggestions and others you may add. We can help our children and grandchildren to

survive spiritually and morally in a world where the pollution index continues to spiral upward. The intent is not to take our children out of the world but, as the Lord prayed, to keep them from evil (see John 17:15).

I know that our Heavenly Father lives. We are his spirit children, and He loves his family.

Jesus is the Christ, and this is his church, which is led by living prophets.

Of this I sincerely testify in the name of Jesus the Christ, amen.

### President Hinckley

We have heard from Bishop Robert D. Hales, Presiding Bishop of the Church, and Elder Joe J. Christensen of the Presidency of the Seventy.

The choir and congregation will now join in singing "The Spirit of God like a Fire Is Burning," following which we shall hear from Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Seventy.

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The chorus and congregation sang "The Spirit of God."

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## Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

This morning I would like to greet and speak not only to the members of the Church but also to those not of our faith who may be participating in the radio or television audience. Thank you for joining with us on this beautiful fall morning.

### Our contemporary "Black Plague"

Life in every era has had its troubles. Surely the Dark Ages were appropriately named, and not one of us is anxious to be transported back even to those later years of, say, the Hundred Years' War or the Black Plague. No,

we're quite happy to have been born in a century of unprecedented material blessings and abundant living; yet in community after community, in small nations and large, we see individuals and families facing heightened anxiety and fear. It would seem that discouragement, depression, and despair are our contemporary "Black Plague." Ours is, as Jesus said it would be, a time of distress with perplexity (see Luke 21:25).

We know that some of the world's most painful suffering is done in silence, in the sorrow of a lonely life. But some of it has more violent expression. Millions around the world are, as one observer