

or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life" (Matthew 19:29).

What are we contributing?

The ills of today's world and fleeting social peace are the result of past wrongdoings and disregard of godly principles. The spiritual strength of every new generation has its roots in parents' and grandparents' love for God and obedience to the gospel. As individuals and as a church, we must ask ourselves what we are contributing to our fellow beings. When Switzerland was in the process of political consolidation at the beginning of its new federation in 1862, the Swiss poet and novelist Gottfried Keller had questions similar to those of our time.

"Have I and my house lived such that I am in a position to be of benefit to the whole and to contribute to the humble embellishment, not in the eyes of an ignorant world, but in the eyes of the highest judge? Then when we ask ourselves how we fare today as a nation before nations and how we have held in trust the assets which have been given us, in that day we should not present ourselves in vain self-glory before the Lord of all nations, for He sees through all insufficiencies, understands how to distinguish between luck and honest efforts, and between substance and appearance."

Let us search our hearts as we ask the question "What shall we do?" and follow the advice of Joshua: "Choose you this day whom ye will serve; . . . but

as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

We have just listened to Sister Ruth B. Wright, second counselor in the general Primary presidency, and Elder Hans B. Ringger of the Seventy.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Council of the Twelve Apostles will be our concluding speaker. Before hearing his address, we express appreciation to the Relief Society Choir from the Olympus Utah Region, the Mormon Youth Chorus, the Melchizedek Priesthood Choir from the University Utah Region, and the Tabernacle Choir, and to their conductors and organists for the beautiful and inspiring music during the conference.

We thank our city officials for the cooperation given the conference; the doctors, Church Health Unit nurses, and ambulance services who have been on hand to render assistance; the ushers and interpreters; and those who are responsible for the beautiful flowers on the stand and on Temple Square.

We express appreciation to local and national press representatives for the coverage of the conference.

We are grateful to the Bonneville International LDS Radio Network and the owners and operators of the many other radio and television stations and cable systems who have given time and made facilities available to carry sessions of the conference in many countries.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell

Gospel provides precious perspective

During the last days, when "all things shall be in commotion" (D&C 88:91), the restored gospel of Jesus Christ provides so many essential things, including precious perspective of seeing "things as

they really are" (Jacob 4:13).

The eminent historian Will Durant wrote of the human need "to seize the value and perspective of passing things. . . . We want to know that the little things are little, and the big things big, before it is too late; we want to see things now

as they will seem forever—“in the light of eternity.”¹

The gospel’s illumination provides so much greater perspective for us concerning the role of the family.

Before citing some challenges to family life, consider, first, brothers and sisters, how living without God in the world brings a functional lack of consistent perspective. If there were no eternal truths, to what principles would mortals look for guidance? If not accountable to God, to whom are we ultimately accountable? Furthermore, if nothing is ever really wrong, then no one is ever really responsible. If there are no fixed boundaries, then there cannot be any excesses. Why should we be surprised, then, at so many disturbing outcomes, including the lack of community, when every man does that which is “right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6; 21:25) and seeks not the righteousness of the Lord but instead walks “in his own way”? (D&C 1:16).

Reflect, for instance, on how inoperative the Ten Commandments are in many lives. Today, *killing*, *stealing*, and bearing *false witness* still carry some social stigma and legal sanction, but sanction is effectively gone regarding sexual immorality, the Sabbath day, honoring fathers and mothers, and the taking of the name of the Lord in vain. Some of this decline represents the bitter harvest of ethical relativism, the philosophy of choice of many, reflecting no fixed, divine truths but merely the mores of the moment. No wonder Ortega y Gasset wisely warned, “If truth does not exist, relativism cannot take itself seriously.”²

Terrible trends in society

Note several terrible trends which, *if uncorrected*, will produce an even worse coalition of consequences.

- In ten years, one-half of all children born in America will be illegitimate.³

- More and more children have no functioning fathers. Already 70 percent of our juvenile criminals come from fatherless homes.⁴

- “Less than half of all children born today will live continuously with their own mother and father throughout childhood.”⁵

- “One-fourth of all adolescents . . . contract a sexually transmitted disease before they graduate from high school.”⁶

- “Fifty-five percent of [American] children under the age of six . . . have both parents or their only parent working in the labor force.”⁷

Endangered families

Father Lehi once described himself as a “trembling parent” (2 Nephi 1:14). There are trembling parents and grandparents today! Some of today’s families already exist in a worse wilderness than did Father Lehi’s. Healthy, traditional families are becoming an endangered species! Perhaps, one day, families may even rank with the threatened spotted owl in effective attention given!

As parenting declines, the need for policing increases. There will always be a shortage of police if there is a shortage of effective parents! Likewise, there will not be enough prisons if there are not enough good homes.

There is, as we all know, much talk about family values, but rhetoric, by itself, cannot bring reform. Nostalgically, many wish for the family life of yesteryear; they regard family decline as regrettable but not reversible. Others, genuinely worried over the spilling social consequences, are busy placing sandbags downstream, even when the frenzied use of sandbags often destroys what little is left of family gardens. A few regard the family as an institution to be drastically redefined or even to be rid of.

There are no perfect families, either in the world or in the Church, but there are many good families. My spiritual

applause also goes to those heroic parents—left alone by death or divorce—who are righteously and “anxiously engaged” in nurturing and providing for their families, often against such heavy odds.

Alas, in some families things do go wretchedly wrong, but these gross failures are no reason to denigrate further the institution of the family. We should make course corrections and fix the leaks, not abandon ship!

Unhealthy attitudes toward families

Much modern despair and violence grow out of unhealthy attitudes towards any authority, including that in families. Thirty-five years ago, a BBC commentator insightfully worried “that we are turning out adults who have an even less clear and consistent attitude towards authority than we have ourselves, and who will be even less capable than their parents in raising children with a sane attitude towards authority, and so an insidious avalanche may be developing, gathering a ghastly momentum from generation to generation.”⁸

The “ghastly momentum” increases as profound social changes now occur in “only a few years” (Moroni 9:12).

Creating successful families

Unfortunately it is easier to praise the family than to create a successful family. It is easier to talk, as I am doing, of family values than to implement those values. It is easier to rejoice over our rich memories of a good family than to provide the rising generation with its own rich memories.

The hard doctrines, however, insist that we ask some hard questions. How can a nation nurture family values without consistently valuing and protecting the family in its public policies? How can we value the family without valuing parenting? And how can we value par-

enting if we do not value marriage? How can there be “love at home” without love in a marriage? So many selfish tugs draw fathers and mothers away from each other and away from their children.

In contrast, so much of the Restoration focuses on fundamental principles pertaining to the family, including sealings of eternal families. Latter-day Saints therefore have no choice but to stand up and to speak up whenever the institution of the family is concerned, even if we are misunderstood, resented, or brushed aside.

After all, mortal families predate the founding of nations, and families will exist after the Almighty “hath made a full end of all nations” (D&C 87:6). For Latter-day Saints, though it is to be done in the Lord’s own way, every year should be the Year of the Family. However, as Latter-day Saints we need to do better in our families—much better! There should be less wringing of hands and more loving arms around our families.

Of all the work of “perfecting the Saints,” none compares to that done in healthy families. President David O. McKay taught, “The home is the basis of a righteous life, and no other instrumentality can take its place nor fulfill its essential functions.”⁹ Sometimes, unintentionally, even certain extracurricular Church activities, insensitively administered, can hamper family life.

Instructively, after the resurrected Jesus taught the Nephites, He said, “Go ye unto your homes, and ponder upon the things which I have said,” and pray and prepare “for the morrow” (3 Nephi 17:3). Jesus did not say go to your civic clubs, town meetings, or even stake centers!

Tend to the family garden

Attending to all family duties includes really teaching our children “to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God”

(D&C 68:25). What a different view of parenting from that of the world. Marie Winn lamented in *Children without Childhood* how there is an emerging but unjustified tendency to treat children as if they have the capacity for unrestricted adult experience.¹⁰

Brothers and sisters, we may not be able to change such trends, but we can refuse to be a part of them.

When parents fail to transmit testimony and theology along with decency, those families are only one generation from serious spiritual decline, having lost their savor. The law of the harvest is nowhere more in evidence and nowhere more relentless than in family gardens!

In addition to our having loving family "sociality," which, one day, will be "coupled with eternal glory," we stress again and again the available remedies of family prayers, family home evenings, and family scripture study (D&C 130:2). Moreover, personal revelation regarding parenting can provide customized guidance and reassurance!

Basic remedies to family problems

Applying basic remedies will take some time and will not fix everything immediately. What could be more basic, however, than "love at home," when annually in America there are four million reports of domestic violence, rivaling the number of births in America!¹¹ Violence in America now kills "the equivalent of a classroomful" of children "every two days."¹²

In the face of such challenges, we need more mothers who know the truth, whose children do not doubt their mothers know it (see Alma 56:48). My children and grandchildren are blessed with such a mother and grandmother. We need more kind and thoughtful fathers who also carry the authority of example. More parents should be remembered as a prophet's daughter, Helen Lee Goates, remembers hers: "A father who

was gentle beneath his firmness, and a mother who was firm beneath her gentleness."¹³

In the healthy family, first and best, we can learn to listen, forgive, praise, and to rejoice in the achievements of others. There also we can learn to tame our egos, work, repent, and love. In families with spiritual perspective, yesterday need not hold tomorrow hostage. If we sometimes act the fool, loving families know this is not our last act; the curtain is not rung down.

To some, these remedies, and things like them, may seem too simple to heal a society stung by so many afflictions. In afflicted ancient Israel, some also disdained the simple, divinely provided remedies, and they perished (see 1 Nephi 17:41).

Focus anew on the family

Obviously, family values mirror our personal priorities. Given the gravity of current conditions, would parents be willing to give up just one outside thing, giving that time and talent instead to the family? Parents and grandparents, please scrutinize your schedules and priorities in order to ensure that life's prime relationships get more prime time! Even consecrated and devoted Brigham Young was once told by the Lord, "Take especial care of your family" (D&C 126:3). Sometimes it is the most conscientious who need this message the most!

Society should focus anew on the headwaters—the family—where values can be taught, lived, experienced, and perpetuated. Otherwise, brothers and sisters, we will witness even more widespread flooding downstream, featuring even more corruption and violence (see Genesis 6:11–12; Matthew 24:37).

If the combination of rainmakers prevails, however, the rains will continue to descend, and the floods will continue to come. Dikes and sandbags downstream will be no match for the coming

crests. More and more families, even nations, if built upon secular sand instead of gospel granite, will suffer.

As the number of dysfunctional families increases, their failures will spill into already burdened schools and streets. It is not a pretty scene even now.

Nations in which traditional idealism gives way to modern cynicism will forfeit the blessings of heaven, which they so urgently need, and such nations will also lose legitimacy in the eyes of their citizens.

Praise be to Jesus

Amid the Babel of prescriptions from "so many kinds of voices in the world," rescuing and redeeming perspective requires our coming to know who Jesus Christ is, how He lived, and what He died for (1 Corinthians 14:10; see also John 10:27). After all, it is Jesus who has given us commanding perspective concerning families.

Therefore, as this Easter day draws to a close, how fitting that we contemplate atoning Jesus—bending and curved in Gethsemane. His bleeding curvature transformed the grammar of death. Until Gethsemane and Calvary, death was a punctuating, rigid exclamation point! Then death, too, curved—into a mere comma!

Praise be to Jesus for bearing the sins and pains of all "the family of Adam" back then (2 Nephi 9:21; 2:20). Let us strive here and now to take especial care of our families as Jesus did of His, "even the family of all the earth" (2 Nephi 2:20). I so pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. *The Story of Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1927), p. 1.
2. José Ortega y Gasset, *The Modern Theme*, trans. James Cleugh (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 29.
3. See President Clinton, "State of the Union Address," CNN Specials, 25 Jan. 1994, p. 3.
4. See "The Basics Debate," *Wall Street Journal*, 18 Nov. 1993, sec. A, p. 18.
5. Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, "Dan Quayle Was Right," *Atlantic Monthly*, Apr. 1993, p. 47.
6. *Research Briefs from Utah Foundation*, 16 July 1993, p. 1.
7. *Research Briefs*, p. 1.
8. Quoted in *The Listener*, 12 Feb. 1959.
9. *Family Home Evening Manual* (1965), p. iii.
10. See *Children without Childhood* (New York: Penguin, 1983), p. 5.
11. See "Callers Weigh in on Domestic Abuse," CNN, 6 Nov. 1993; *The World Almanac* (Mahwah, N.J.: Funk and Wagnall's, 1993), p. 954.
12. Jennifer Dixon, "A Youth Dies by Gunfire Every Two Hours," *Deseret News*, 20 Jan. 1994, sec. A, p. 1.
13. In Neal A. Maxwell, *That My Family Should Partake* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1974), p. 56.

President Monson

He to whom we have listened is Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Council of the Twelve Apostles. And with his remarks and the hymn and the prayer to follow, another great conference comes to a close.

We have missed Elder Marvin J. Ashton and another familiar soul at our conferences, D. Arthur Haycock, each of whom has passed away since our last conference. Our hearts and our prayers go out to Sister Ashton, Sister Haycock, and all who have loved and lost someone during this period.

President Benson's chair, situated between President Hinckley and me, has been unoccupied at this conference, although he has viewed the conference proceedings at his apartment by television. Our hearts are full of love for