

Brothers and sisters, live the commandments. Do what is right. Take advantage of this great opportunity in your life to live it well, to be good, to have good works, and to influence other people for good. The gospel is true. I hope that every day of my life I might be able to do some good and to encourage somebody to live a better life and to understand what has been restored to the earth, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The chorus sang "Come unto Jesus."

President Hinckley

Elder David B. Haight of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has just spoken to us, followed by the Mormon Youth Chorus singing "Come unto Jesus."

Sister Anne G. Wirthlin, first counselor in the Primary general presidency, will now speak to us.

Sister Anne G. Wirthlin

Teaching children of the Savior brings peace to them

While teaching the Nephite people, the Savior affirmed the words of the prophet Isaiah, who prophesied of Israel in the latter days: "For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. . . .

" . . . For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord" (3 Nephi 22:7, 10).

The Savior then revealed one of the ways in which His covenant of peace would be preserved for the righteous in the last days: "And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children" (3 Nephi 22:13).

These words of the Savior are the theme for Primary and are fulfilled in the stated purpose of Primary: to teach children the gospel of Jesus Christ and help them learn to live it.

As we witness the unfolding events of the last days, we cannot doubt that in this scripture the Lord is speaking directly to us. We are Israel of the latter days. We are they who must teach our children of Him. Peace that endures is

not dependent upon outside forces that are beyond our control. "Learn of me, and listen to my words; walk in the meekness of my Spirit, and you shall have peace in me" (D&C 19:23).

The Lord's words spoken centuries ago are words of hope and assurance that give comfort to righteous parents who teach their children of Him. They speak to us at a time when peace in the hearts of children can seem but an elusive dream. But the Savior has assured us that it can be a reality if we teach our children. Primary supports parents in this important responsibility.

Young children understand great truths

While on a leadership training assignment to Brazil, I had the opportunity to visit a Primary nursery class. Approximately eight children were seated around a table with their teacher. I watched in awe as these little ones, two and three years old, sat for a few brief moments focused in rapt attention on a picture the teacher was holding of the Savior with the children. I heard her tell them how He loves children and how He loves each one of them. She taught them that Heavenly Father loves them too. I watched them listen, and I felt that they were un-

derstanding much more than I might have thought possible. They were hearing her words and feeling her love. In the beauty and simplicity of those few moments, those children were being taught the answer to life's most important question, "Who am I?" In their pure, child-like faith, their spirits were receptive to the truths they were being taught. That experience will be repeated for them in their nursery class Sunday after Sunday. These are significant teaching moments in the lives of young children at a time when they are young to learn.

Recent research on the development of a child's brain has revealed new insights into how and when a child learns. I quote from a recent study: "From birth, a baby's brain cells proliferate wildly, making connections that may shape a lifetime of experience. The first three years are critical" (J. Madeleine Nash, "Fertile Minds," *Time*, 3 Feb. 1997, 49).

Is it surprising that our Father in Heaven fashioned the minds of very young children to be so capable of learning at a time when they need to be taught who they are and what they must do? The years from birth to age 10 are the peak years for acquiring the language that will become the foundation for understanding future knowledge and truth. That foundation is formed by the words they hear and the impressions that come to them from the world around them. It is an ideal time for parents to read to their children from the scriptures. They will begin to learn the language of the scriptures.

Learning the scriptures in Primary

You may have noticed children on their way to Primary with their scriptures in hand. Primary children this year are being taught from the scriptures, and they are learning to use them. Our theme for sharing time is "I Know the Scriptures Are True." One Sunday morning I visited a Primary sharing time, and I noticed the children had their

scriptures open on their laps. The Primary presidency and the teachers were helping them find stories of the prophets in their scriptures. I was asked to share a favorite scripture with the children. When I finished, a little four-year-old girl on the front row held up her scriptures and said, "That scripture is in my scriptures too." Through the guidance of loving parents and dedicated teachers, small children can become familiar with the scriptures and the spirit that accompanies them.

One Primary leader shared how grateful she was for this focus in Primary. She said that she and her husband read the scriptures to their children—ages 2, 3, and 4—every night before they go to bed. I asked her to tell me more. I must admit I questioned that children so young could understand the language of the scriptures. She said that she and her husband had the same doubts when they first began reading with their children. But she said after the first week the language was not an issue. The children love reading together and feeling the Spirit, and it's amazing how much they understand.

Teach children from the scriptures

A very young child's potential for learning and understanding is far greater than we tend to believe. The exciting possibility is that while children are learning new words daily, they can learn the language of the scriptures. In time, through the guidance of parents and teachers, they will grow in their understanding that Heavenly Father is speaking to them through the scriptures, that the scriptures can help them find answers to their problems.

A friend shared an experience she had with her son, Alex, when their family moved to another location. The move was not easy for Alex. It was difficult for him to go to a new school. He was worried about being away from his home and family so much that he didn't want

to go to school. One day his mother read to him the scripture found in 2 Timothy 1:7: "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

She said, "I told Alex how this scripture had helped me many times when I felt afraid." Through her love and by sharing her personal experience with the scripture, she helped Alex overcome his fear, but more important, she made it possible for him to have an experience with the scriptures and to understand how they can be a power in his life.

Ponder the scriptures as families

Nephi said, "For my soul delighteth in the scriptures, and my heart pondereth them, and writeth them for the learning and the profit of my children" (2 Nephi 4:15).

How can we engage our children in learning from the scriptures so that the testimonies of the prophets will make a difference in their lives? We have been counseled to read the scriptures together as families. When scripture reading and sharing is a tradition in our families, then our children are more likely to make it a habit in their personal lives.

When our children were young, we felt it was important to establish this tradition in our family. We decided to read the Book of Mormon with the goal to complete the book by the end of the school year. Each morning we read a chapter before breakfast, and we reached our goal. While I would not wish to take anything away from the good things that came from that experience for all of us, we reflected in the end that perhaps our focus was more on our goal than on what we were learning in the process. In the early-morning rush hour that ended at the breakfast table, we had little time to share ideas or ponder on the meaning of God's word in our lives. When the Savior taught the Nephites, he said, "Go ye unto your homes, and ponder upon the things which

I have said, and ask of the Father, in my name, that ye may understand, and prepare your minds for the morrow, and I come unto you again" (3 Nephi 17:3).

The Savior has given us a pattern to follow as we study the scriptures. We hear the word, we ponder upon its meaning, we ask our Heavenly Father to help us understand, and then our minds and hearts are prepared to receive the promised blessings. Pondering is more than reading words; it is searching for meanings that will help us as we relate to one another and as we make choices in our lives. It is allowing the word to move from our minds to our hearts. The Spirit bears witness to our hearts as we prayerfully seek to know the things of our Heavenly Father. When we have that witness and knowledge, we think and live and relate to each other in more Christlike ways.

Be an example to your children

As parents, our children look to us and our example to guide them. When we consistently live what the scriptures teach, we provide them with an anchor that will guide them in discerning truth in a world of conflicting values. With the scriptures as a reference point, we can help them process their experiences and the consequences of their choices. By so doing, we help them keep the eternal perspective always in focus so they never forget who they are and where they are going.

The Prophet Joseph was prepared for the work he was to do through devoted, wise parents who loved the Lord. They read from the scriptures and taught their children from them. And so when young Joseph was confused and needed direction, it was natural for him to go to the scriptures. He said, "At about the age of twelve years my mind became seriously impressed with regard to the all important concerns for the welfare of my immortal soul which led

me to search the scriptures believing as I was taught, that they contained the word of God" (*The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, comp. Dean C. Jessee [1984], 4–5; spelling modernized).

Our prophet's counsel

President Hinckley has counseled parents: "Read to your children. Read the story of the Son of God. Read to them from the New Testament. Read to them from the Book of Mormon. It will take time, and you are very busy, but it will prove to be a great blessing in your lives as well as in their lives. And there will grow in their hearts a great love for the Savior of the world, the only perfect man who walked the earth. He will become to them a very real living being, and His great atoning sacrifice, as they grow to manhood and womanhood, will take on a new and more glorious meaning in their lives" (quoted in *Church News*, 6 Dec. 1997, 2). Brothers and sisters, that glorious promise from our prophet can be ours if we read to our children from the scriptures.

There can be no greater joy than to know that our children love the Lord, no greater peace than that which comes

when we feel of His love and understand the meaning of His atoning sacrifice. That spirit which comes when we share sacred things of the heart will bond us together as families. John expressed it well: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 1:4).

It is my testimony that this will be our blessing as we follow the counsel of our prophet, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

Thank you, Sister Wirthlin, first counselor in the Primary general presidency.

The chorus and congregation will now join in singing "Come, Come, Ye Saints," following which we shall hear from Bishop Richard C. Edgley, First Counselor in the Presiding Bishopric. He will be followed by Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

The chorus and congregation sang "Come, Come, Ye Saints."

Bishop Richard C. Edgley

Mormons are Christian

Some years ago when I was working in a different organization, our personnel director, a devout Catholic, came into my office with his secretary, Darlene. I could readily see that Darlene was not there of her own free will and would rather be elsewhere. The personnel director's greeting words to me were, "Will you please tell Darlene that Mormons are Christian. I have been arguing with her for over half an hour, and I cannot convince her of that fact. She needs to hear it from you."

My first concern was, have I done something in my own life that would cause Darlene to question my faith in and loyalty to the Savior? But then I quickly recognized that her doubts were not directed to me personally.

After inviting them to sit down, I asked Darlene why she thought we were not Christians. Her answer was that her minister had told her so. I asked her if she knew the official name of the Church. She did not. She knew the Church only by the name of Mormon. I explained the name to be The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and then asked if it did