

President Boyd K. Packer

Parents in Zion

In 1831 the Lord gave a revelation to parents in Zion.¹ It is about parents that I wish to speak.

I have served in the Quorum of the Twelve for 28 years, and 9 years as an Assistant to the Twelve. Put together, that makes 37 years—exactly half my life.

But I have another calling which I have held even longer. I am a parent—a father and a grandfather. It took years to earn the *grandfather* title—another 20 years the title of *great-grandfather*. These titles—*father, grandfather, mother, grandmother*—carry responsibility and an authority which comes in part from experience. Experience is a compelling teacher.

Balancing family and Church

My calling in the priesthood defines my position in the Church; the title *grandfather*, my position in the family. I want to talk about both of them together.

Parenthood stands among the most important activities to which Latter-day Saints may devote themselves. Many members face conflicts as they struggle to balance their responsibility as parents together with faithful activity in the Church.

There are things vital to the well-being of a family which can be found only by going to church. There is the priesthood, which empowers a man to lead and bless his wife and children, and covenants which bind them together forever.

The Church was commanded to “meet together often”² and told, “When ye are assembled together ye shall instruct and edify each other.”³ Alma the Elder and Alma the Younger gave the same instruction to their people.⁴

We are commanded to “turn the heart[s] of the fathers to the children, and the heart[s] of the children to their fathers.”⁵

The Lord addressed Joseph Smith Jr. by name and said, “You have not kept the commandments, and must needs stand rebuked.”⁶ He had failed to teach his children. That is the only time the word *rebuke* is used in correcting him.

His counselor Frederick G. Williams was under the same condemnation: “You have not taught your children light and truth.”⁷ Sidney Rigdon was told the same thing, as was Bishop Newel K. Whitney,⁸ and the Lord added, “What I say unto one I say unto all.”⁹

Church’s inspired guidance for families

[We have watched the standards of morality sink ever lower until now they are in a free-fall. At the same time we have seen an outpouring of inspired guidance for parents and for families.

The whole of the curriculum and all of the activities of the Church have been restructured and correlated with the home:

- Ward teaching became home teaching.

- Family home evening was reestablished.

- Genealogy was renamed family history and set to collect records of all the families.

- And then the historic proclamation on the family was issued by the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles.

- The family became, and remains, a prevailing theme in meetings, conferences, and councils.

- All as a prelude to an unprecedented era of building temples wherein the authority to seal families together forever is exercised.

Can you see the spirit of inspiration resting upon the servants of the Lord and upon parents? Can we understand the challenge and the assault now leveled at the family?

Use care in scheduling activities

In providing out-of-home activities for the family, we must use care; otherwise, we could be like a father determined to provide everything for his family. He devotes every energy to that end and succeeds; only then does he discover that what they needed most—to be together as a family—has been neglected. And he reaps sorrow in place of contentment.

How easy it is, in our desire to provide schedules of programs and activities, to overlook the responsibilities of the parent and the essential need for families to have time together.

We must be careful lest programs and activities of the Church become too heavy for some families to carry. The principles of the gospel, where understood and applied, strengthen and protect both individuals and families. Devotion to the family and devotion to the Church are not different and separate things.

Keep family and Church in perspective

I recently saw a woman respond when it was said of another, "Since she had the new baby, she isn't doing anything in the Church." You could almost see a baby in her arms as she protested with emotion: "She *is* doing something in the Church. She gave that baby life. She nurtures and teaches it. She is doing the most important thing that she can do in the Church."

How would you respond to this question: "Because of their handicapped child, she is confined to the home and he works two jobs to meet the extra

expenses. They seldom attend—can we count them as active in the Church?"

And have you ever heard a woman say, "My husband is a very good father, but he's never been a bishop or a stake president or done anything important in the Church." In response to that, a father vigorously said, "What is more important in the Church than being a good father?"

Faithful attendance at church, together with careful attention to the needs of the family, is a near-perfect combination. In church we are taught the great plan of happiness.¹⁰ At home we apply what we have learned. Every call, every service in the Church brings experience and valuable insights which carry over into family life.

Would our perspective be more clear if we could, for a moment, look upon parenthood as a calling in the Church? Actually, it is so much more than that; but if we could look at it that way for a moment, we could reach a better balance in the way we schedule families.

Do not burden families unnecessarily

I do not want anyone to use what I say to excuse them in turning down an inspired call from the Lord. I *do* want to encourage leaders to carefully consider the home lest they issue calls or schedule activities which place an unnecessary burden on parents and families.

Recently I read a letter from a young couple whose callings in the Church frequently require them to hire a sitter for their small children in order for them to attend their meetings. It has become very difficult for both of them to be home with their children at the same time. Can you see something out of balance there?

Every time you schedule a youngster, you schedule a family—particularly the mother.

Consider the mother who, in addition to her own Church calling and that

of her husband, must get her children ready and run from one activity to another. Some mothers become discouraged—even depressed. I receive letters using the word *guilt* because they cannot do it all.

Attending church is, or should be, a respite from the pressures of everyday life. It should bring peace and contentment. If it brings pressure and discouragement, then something is out of balance.

And the Church is not the only responsibility parents have. Other agencies have a very legitimate reason to call upon the resources of the family—schools, employers, community—all need to be balanced in.

Recently a mother told me her family had moved from a rural, scattered ward where, of necessity, activities were consolidated into one weekday night. It was wonderful. They had time for their family. I can see them sitting around the table together.

They moved west into a larger ward where members were closer to the chapel. She said, "Now our family is scheduled Tuesday night, Wednesday night, Thursday night, Friday night, Saturday night, and Sunday night. It is very hard on our family."

Remember, when you schedule a youngster, you schedule a family—particularly the mother.

Most families try very hard; but some, when burdened with problems of health and finance, simply become exhausted trying to keep up, and eventually they withdraw into inactivity. They do not see that they are moving from the one best source of light and truth, of help with their family, into the shadows where danger and heartbreak await.

I must touch upon what must surely be the most difficult problem to solve. Some youngsters receive very little teaching and support at home. There is no question but that we must provide for them. But if we provide a constant sched-

ule of out-of-home activities sufficient to compensate for the loss in those homes, it may make it difficult for attentive parents to have time to be with and teach their own children. Only prayer and inspiration can lead us to find this difficult balance.

Importance of learning at home

We often hear, "We must provide frequent and exciting activities lest our youth will go to less wholesome places." Some of them will. But I have the conviction that if we teach parents to be responsible and allow them sufficient time, over the long course their children will be at home.

There, at home, they can learn what cannot be effectively taught in either Church or school. At home they can learn to work and to take responsibility. They learn what to do when they have children of their own.

For example, in the Church children are taught the principle of tithing, but it is at home that the principle is applied. At home even young children can be shown how to figure a tithe and how it is paid.

One time President and Sister Harold B. Lee were in our home. Sister Lee put a handful of pennies on a table before our young son. She had him slide the shiny ones to one side and said, "These are your tithing; these belong to the Lord. The others are yours to keep." He thoughtfully looked from one pile to the other and then said, "Don't you have any more dirty ones?" That was when the real teaching moment began!

Use the ward council to establish balance

The ward council is the perfect place to establish the balance between home and Church. Here the brethren of the priesthood, themselves fathers, and sisters of the auxiliaries, themselves mothers, can, with inspired insight, coordinate

the work of the organizations, each of which serves different members of the family.

Members of the council can compare what each organization is providing for each member and how much time and money are required. They can unite rather than divide families and provide watch care over single parents, the childless, the unmarried, the elderly, the handicapped—and provide much more than just activities for the children and young people.

The ward council has resources often overlooked. For instance, grandparents, while not filling callings, can help young families who are finding their way along the same path they once walked.

The Lord warned parents, "Inasmuch as parents have children in Zion, . . . that teach them not to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, when eight years old, the sin be upon the heads of the parents."¹¹

The ward council is ideal for our present need. Here the home and the family can be anchored in place, and the Church can support rather than supplant the parents. Fathers and mothers will understand both their obligation to teach their children and the blessings provided by the Church.

Most important things learned at home

As the world grows ever more threatening, the powers of heaven draw ever closer to families and parents.

I have studied much in the scriptures and have taught from them. I have read much from what the prophets and apostles have spoken. They have had a profound influence upon me as a man and as a father.

But most of what I know about how our Father in Heaven really feels about us, His children, I have learned from the way I feel about my wife and my children and their children. This I have learned at home. I have learned it from my parents and from my wife's parents, from my beloved wife and from my children, and I can therefore testify of a loving Heavenly Father and of a redeeming Lord. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. See Doctrine and Covenants 68:25.
2. Doctrine and Covenants 20:75.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 43:8.
4. See Mosiah 18:25; Alma 6:6.
5. Malachi 4:6; see also 3 Nephi 25:5–6; Doctrine and Covenants 2:2–3.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 93:47.
7. See Doctrine and Covenants 93:41–42.
8. See Doctrine and Covenants 93:44, 50.
9. Doctrine and Covenants 93:49.
10. See Alma 12:32.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 68:25.

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin

Significant dates and events in our lives

We often mark significant dates on our calendars, such as holidays and birthdays. Dates that come around every year help us measure progress in our lives. One annual event, New Year's Day, is a time of reflection and resolution.

Our baptism date, which commemorates our spiritual rebirth, is an annual occasion worthy of special note. We pause to recognize the date of our temple sealing as a special anniversary because that ordinance binds us together forever with our most cherished loved ones. Worthiness interviews, especially