

them to bed than it is to read the scriptures to them, have prayers and stories, and tuck them in. But they look forward to this evening ritual, and I know this investment, even when I'm too tired to move, will pay eternal dividends." Consistent leading helps youth make wise choices, and our trust in them increases.

I remember when I was about 16 years old overhearing Mom talking to Dad. She was concerned about some choices I was making. I was not guilty of any sin more serious than the immaturity of youth, but Mom was worried. What Dad said scared into my heart. "Don't worry," he said to Mom. "I trust Sharon, and I know she'll do the right thing." Those hours in the hayfield paid off then and there. From that moment on I was bound to those loving, trusting parents.

One of the greatest tests for parents and leaders is to love the one who seems to be unlovable. This is tough duty. It stretches the heartstrings and wrenches the soul. When heartbroken parents pray for help, it often comes in the form of angel aunts or uncles, grandmas or grandpas, good friends, and leaders surrounding our loved one. They can reinforce our very message that may put our child on the track we've been praying for.

### Harvest time for parents

Loving wisely and leading purposefully will help stem the tide of wickedness as we prepare the next generation for the exhilarating delights of parenthood. We never forget the joys of our 12-year-old when he first passes the sacrament or hearing the sacramental prayer given in the voice of our son. How do you explain the feeling of hearing your daughter bear her testimony of the Savior or watching her receive her Young Womanhood medallion?

We catch a glimpse of heaven when we are in the temple with our child who is kneeling across the altar with a worthy companion. They are prepared to start a life together of promise and accomplishments that we have helped to nurture. This is harvest time.

I close with my testimony that we are not alone in this sacred trust of parenting, loving, and leading. There is no greater joy. It is worth every sacrifice, every inconvenient minute, every ounce of patience, personal discipline, and endurance. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## Elder Russell M. Nelson

### Dangerous rapids on the Colorado River

Years ago when Sister Nelson and I had several teenage daughters, we took our family on a vacation far away from telephones and boyfriends. We went on a raft trip down the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon. As we started our journey, we had no idea how dangerous this trip could be.

The first day was beautiful. But on the second day, when we approached Horn Creek rapids and saw that precipitous drop ahead, I was terrified. Floating

on a rubber raft, our precious family was about to plunge over a waterfall! Instinctively I put one arm around my wife and the other around our youngest daughter. To protect them, I tried to hold them close to me. But as we reached the precipice, the bended raft became a giant sling and shot me into the air. I landed into the roiling rapids of the river. I had a hard time coming up. Each time I tried to find air, I hit the underside of the raft. My family couldn't see me, but I could hear them shouting, "Daddy! Where's Daddy?"

I finally found the side of the raft and rose to the surface. The family pulled my nearly drowned body out of the water. We were thankful to be safely reunited.

The next several days were pleasant and delightful. Then came the last day, when we were to go over Lava Falls, known as the most dangerous drop of the journey. When I saw what was ahead, I immediately asked to beach the raft and hold an emergency family council meeting, knowing that if we were to survive this experience, we needed to plan carefully. I reasoned with our family, "No matter what happens, the rubber raft will remain on top of the water. If we cling with all our might to ropes secured to the raft, we can make it. Even if the raft should capsize, we will be all right if we hang tightly to the ropes."

I turned to our little seven-year-old daughter and said, "All of the others will cling to a rope. But you will need to hold on to your daddy. Sit behind me. Put your arms around me and hold me tightly while I hold the rope."

That we did. We crossed those steep, rough rapids—hanging on for dear life—and all of us made it safely.<sup>1</sup>

### The lesson

Brothers and sisters, I nearly lost my life learning a lesson that I now give to you. As we go through life, even through very rough waters, a father's instinctive impulse to cling tightly to his wife or to his children may not be the best way to accomplish his objective. Instead, if he will lovingly cling to the Savior and the iron rod of the gospel, his family will want to cling to him and to the Savior.

This lesson is surely not limited to fathers. Regardless of gender, marital status, or age, individuals can choose to link themselves directly to the Savior, hold fast to the rod of His truth, and lead by the light of that truth. By so doing, they become examples of righteousness to whom others will want to cling.

### The commandment

With the Lord, families are essential. He created the earth that we could gain physical bodies and form families.<sup>2</sup> He established His Church to exalt families. He provides temples so that families can be together forever.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, He expects fathers to preside over, provide for, and protect their families.<sup>4</sup> But the Master has asked for much more. Etched in sacred scripture is the commandment to "set in order thy house."<sup>5</sup> Once we as parents understand the importance and meaning of that commandment, we need to learn how to do it.

### How to set your house in order

To set our house in an order pleasing to the Lord, we need to do it His way. We are to employ His attributes of "righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, [and] meekness."<sup>6</sup> Each father should remember that "no power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned."<sup>7</sup>

Parents are to be living examples of "kindness, and pure knowledge, which . . . greatly enlarge the soul."<sup>8</sup> Each mother and father should lay aside selfish interests and avoid any thought of hypocrisy, physical force, or evil speaking.<sup>9</sup> Parents soon learn that each child has an inborn yearning to be free. Each individual wants to make his or her own way. No one wants to be restrained, even by a well-intentioned parent. But all of us can cling to the Lord.

Ages ago, Job taught that concept. He said, "My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go."<sup>10</sup> Nephi also taught, "Whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and . . . hold fast unto it, . . . would never perish."<sup>11</sup>

These tenets are timeless as the gospel and endless as eternity. Ponder these additional scriptural admonitions:

From the Old Testament Proverbs we read, "Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life."<sup>12</sup>

From the New Testament: "Brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught."<sup>13</sup>

From the Book of Mormon we learn about multitudes who were "continually holding fast to the rod of iron,"<sup>14</sup> which Nephi likened to "the word of God."<sup>15</sup> Anchored in truth, that iron rod is immovable and immutable.

### Other divine mandates

Not only are parents to cling to the word of the Lord, but they have a divine mandate to teach it to their children. Scriptural direction is very clear:

"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."<sup>16</sup>

That commandment places responsibility and accountability for the teaching of children squarely upon the shoulders of the parents. The proclamation to the world regarding the family warns that individuals "who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God."<sup>17</sup> Today I solemnly reaffirm that reality.

In discharging these duties, we need both the Church and the family. They work hand in hand to strengthen each other. The Church exists to exalt the family. And the family is the fundamental unit of the Church.

These interrelationships are evident as we study the early history of the Church. In 1833 the Lord rebuked young leaders of His Church because of parental shortcomings. The Lord said:

"I have commanded you to bring up your children in light and truth.

"But verily I say unto you, . . .

"You have not taught your children light and truth, according to the commandments. . . .

"And now a commandment I give unto you [that] you shall set in order your own house, for there are many things that are not right in your house.

". . . First set in order thy house."<sup>18</sup>

This revelation represents one of the many powerful validations of the integrity of the Prophet Joseph Smith. He did not delete from scripture words of stinging rebuke, even though some were directed to himself.<sup>19</sup>

In our day the First Presidency has again stressed parental priority. From their recent letter to the Saints, I quote: "We call upon parents to devote their best efforts to the teaching and rearing of their children in gospel principles which will keep them close to the Church. The home is the basis of a righteous life, and no other instrumentality can take its place or fulfill its essential functions in carrying forward this God-given responsibility."<sup>20</sup>

### What should parents teach?

With this sacred charge in mind, let us consider what we should teach. Scriptures direct parents to teach faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost.<sup>21</sup> Parents are to teach the plan of salvation<sup>22</sup> and the importance of living in complete accord with the commandments of God.<sup>23</sup> Otherwise, their children will surely suffer in ignorance of God's redeeming and liberating law.<sup>24</sup> Parents should also teach by example how to consecrate their lives—using their time, talents, tithing, and substance<sup>25</sup> to establish the Church and kingdom of God upon the earth.<sup>26</sup> Living in that manner will literally bless their posterity. A scripture states, "Thy duty is unto the church forever, and this because of thy family."<sup>27</sup>

## Opposition to the family

Parents and children should realize that strong opposition will always come against the work and will of the Lord.<sup>28</sup> Because the work (and glory) of God is to bring to pass our immortality and eternal life as a family,<sup>29</sup> it logically follows that the work of the adversary will strike directly at the heart of the home—the family. Relentlessly Lucifer attacks the sanctity of life and the joy of parenthood.

Because the evil one is ever at work, our vigilance cannot be relaxed—not even for a moment. A small and seemingly innocent invitation can turn into a tall temptation that can lead to tragic transgression. Night and day, at home or away, we must shun sin and “hold fast that which is good.”<sup>30</sup>

The seditious evils of pornography, abortion, and addiction to harmful substances serve as termites to erode the undergirding strength of a happy home and a faithful family. We cannot yield to any iniquity without putting our families at risk.

Satan wants us to be miserable just as he is.<sup>31</sup> He would animate our carnal appetites and entice us to live in spiritual darkness and doubt the reality of life after death. The Apostle Paul observed, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.”<sup>32</sup>

## Perpetuation of family blessings

An understanding of God’s great plan of happiness, however, fortifies our faith in the future. His plan provides answers to ageless questions: Are all our sympathies and love for each other only temporary—to be lost in death? No! Can family life endure beyond this period of mortal probation? Yes! God has revealed the eternal nature of celestial marriage and the family as the source of our greatest joy.

Brethren and sisters, material possessions and honors of the world do not en-

sure. But your union as wife, husband, and family can. The only duration of family life that satisfies the loftiest longings of the human soul is forever. No sacrifice is too great to have the blessings of an eternal marriage. To qualify, one needs only to deny oneself of ungodliness and honor the ordinances of the temple. By making and keeping sacred temple covenants, we evidence our love for God, for our companion, and our real regard for our posterity—even those yet unborn. Our family is the focus of our greatest work and joy in this life; so will it be throughout all eternity, when we can “inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, . . . powers, dominions, . . . exaltation and glory.”<sup>33</sup>

These priceless blessings can be ours if we set our houses in order now and faithfully cling to the gospel. God lives. Jesus is the Christ. This is His Church. President Gordon B. Hinckley is His prophet. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## NOTES

1. See Russell M. Nelson and Rebecca M. Taylor, “Friend to Friend,” *Friend*, Mar. 1997, 6–7.
2. See Doctrine and Covenants 2:1–3.
3. See Doctrine and Covenants 138:47–48.
4. See 1 Timothy 5:8.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 93:44; see also 2 Kings 20:1; Isaiah 38:1.
6. 1 Timothy 6:11.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 121:41.
8. Doctrine and Covenants 121:42.
9. See 1 Peter 2:1.
10. Job 27:6.
11. 1 Nephi 15:24.
12. Proverbs 4:13.
13. 2 Thessalonians 2:15. Other related scriptures include “Hold fast the . . . sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 1:13), and “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering” (Hebrews 10:23).
14. 1 Nephi 8:30.
15. 1 Nephi 11:25.

16. Doctrine and Covenants 68:25; italics added.
17. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
18. Doctrine and Covenants 93:40–44.
19. See Doctrine and Covenants 93:47.
20. That letter, dated February 11, 1999, and signed by Presidents Gordon B. Hinckley, Thomas S. Monson, and James E. Faust, also described what parents might do:  
 "We counsel parents and children to give highest priority to family prayer, family home evening, gospel study and instruction, and wholesome family activities. However worthy and appropriate other demands or activities may be, they must not be permitted to displace the divinely appointed duties that only parents and families can adequately perform" (also in "Policies, Announcements, and Appointments," *Ensign*, June 1999, 80).
21. See Moroni 8:10; Doctrine and Covenants 19:31; 68:25–34; 138:33; Articles of Faith 1:4.
22. See Moses 6:58–62.
23. See Leviticus 10:11; Deuteronomy 6:7; Mosiah 4:14.
24. See 2 Nephi 2:26; Mosiah 1:3; 5:8; Doctrine and Covenants 98:8.
25. See Mosiah 4:21–26; 18:27; Alma 1:27.
26. See Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 6:38.
27. Doctrine and Covenants 23:3.
28. See Moroni 7:12–19.
29. See Moses 1:39.
30. 1 Thessalonians 5:21.
31. See 2 Nephi 2:17–18, 27.
32. 1 Corinthians 15:19.
33. Doctrine and Covenants 132:19.

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The choir sang "Did You Think to Pray?"

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### President Hinckley

"Don't forget to pray." As you leave the conference this morning, we ask you to obey traffic rules and to be careful.

We express our appreciation to the choir for the beautiful music.

Following my remarks, the session will conclude with the choir singing "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty." The benediction will then be offered by Elder R. Conrad Schultz of the Seventy. The concluding session of this conference will begin at 2:00 this afternoon.

## President Gordon B. Hinckley

### The perilous times in which we live

My beloved brethren and sisters, I accept this opportunity in humility. I pray that I may be guided by the Spirit of the Lord in that which I say.

I have just been handed a note that says that a U.S. missile attack is under way. I need not remind you that we live in perilous times. I desire to speak concerning these times and our circumstances as members of this Church.

You are acutely aware of the events of September 11, less than a month ago. Out of that vicious and ugly attack we are plunged into a state of war. It is the first

war of the 21st century. The last century has been described as the most wartorn in human history. Now we are off on another dangerous undertaking, the unfolding of which and the end thereof we do not know. For the first time since we became a nation, the United States has been seriously attacked on its mainland soil. But this was not an attack on the United States alone. It was an attack on men and nations of goodwill everywhere. It was well planned, boldly executed, and the results were disastrous. It is estimated that more than 5,000 innocent people died. Among these were many from other na-