

tiny of His children. The Lord knows us, He loves us, He wants us to succeed, and He encourages us by saying:

“And see that all . . . things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that [men or women] should run faster than [they have] strength. . . . [But] it is expedient that [they] should be diligent” (Mosiah 4:27).

Are we diligent in living the commandments of God without running beyond our strength? Or are we just leisurely strolling along? Are we using our time, talents, and means wisely? Are we focused on the things which matter most? Are we following the inspired counsel of the prophets?

### Prophets' counsel about families

One example of great importance for humanity is strengthening our own families. The principle of family home evening was given to us in 1915. President McKay reminded parents again in 1964 that “no other success can compensate for failure in the home” (quoting J. E. McCulloch, *Home: The Savior of Civilization* [1924], 42; in Conference Report, Apr. 1964, 5). In 1995 the prophets of our day called upon all the world to strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society. And only three years ago the First Presidency

and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles lovingly stated:

“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” (First Presidency letter, 11 Feb. 1999; quoted in *Ensign*, June 1999, 80).

### Renew commitment to following prophets

Let us in humility and faith refresh our dedication and our commitment to follow the prophets, seers, and revelators in all diligence. Let us listen and be instructed and edified by those who hold all the keys of the kingdom. And as we attend this conference, may our hearts be changed, that there will be a great desire to do good (see Alma 19:33), and that we will be pioneers in building a spiritual foundation that will establish the Church in our part of the world. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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The choir and congregation sang  
“Come, O Thou King of Kings.”

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## Sister Coleen K. Menlove

### A voice of gladness and hope

I like exclamation marks! I use them often when writing notes to myself and to others. It is a way to show enthusiasm and commitment. One of my favorite scriptures is punctuated with an exclamation mark: “Now, what do we hear in the gospel which we have received? A voice of gladness!”

There are 14 more exclamation marks in the rest of the verse and the next four verses that follow. They read in part:

“A voice of mercy from heaven; and a voice of truth out of the earth; . . . a voice of . . . glad tidings of great joy. . . .

“. . . Glorious is the voice we hear from heaven, proclaiming in our ears, glory, and salvation . . . !”<sup>1</sup>—with an exclamation mark.

We can hear a voice of gladness that brings exclamations of hope and joy into our lives. The joy of our testimonies of the Savior can punctuate every aspect of our lives as we seek to come unto Christ.

### **Bring up children in light and truth**

What about our children? Do they hear exclamations of joy and hope in the gospel? After a Primary lesson about Joseph Smith's First Vision, the class was asked to draw pictures to take home and share with their families. The children had been taught about the darkness Joseph experienced before the appearance of the Father and the Son. A six-year-old girl picked up a black crayon and started to draw. She colored the bottom and up one side of the page as dark as she could. When her teacher asked her about the picture, she said she was drawing Joseph Smith in the darkness.

Her teacher inquired, "Do you know that when Heavenly Father and Jesus appeared, all the darkness had to leave? Heavenly Father and Jesus are always more powerful than Satan, and They will protect you." The child turned back to her paper. In the top corner, she drew an outline of two figures; and then, trading her black crayon for a bright yellow one, she filled the rest of the page with light.

It is this light, the light of the restored gospel—a "voice of gladness"—that parents can help their children come to know. The adversary is real, but children can feel the peace and the joy that come as they exercise faith in Jesus Christ. Our children will not experience this light unless we teach them the gospel.

The Lord directed parents to "bring up [their] children in light and truth."<sup>2</sup> He also instructed us to teach our children "to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord,"<sup>3</sup> and "to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ . . . , and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost."<sup>4</sup> We help tune their ears, minds, and hearts to

recognize "a voice of gladness" and desire to be worthy to obtain eternal joy when we teach the truths of the gospel.

This is exemplified in the Book of Mormon. Enos's father taught him "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." This great blessing caused Enos to proclaim, "Blessed be the name of my God for it."<sup>5</sup> Enos then explains, "The words which I had often heard my father speak concerning eternal life, and the joy of the saints, sunk deep into my heart."<sup>6</sup>

### **A mother teaches of Christ**

A friend shared an experience she had as a small child in a branch of the Church where she was the only child of Primary age. Week after week, her mother held home Primary on the same day and at the same time. She eagerly anticipated sitting on the sofa with her mother and learning the gospel of Jesus Christ and how to live it. Minutes carefully recorded by her mother in a notebook revealed that the home Primary meetings always included prayers, songs, and a lesson.

The desire of this mother's heart was for her little daughter to develop a testimony of Jesus Christ and to feel the joy of the gospel. She provided her daughter with what had been so important to her as a child. This little girl, now a woman of faith and covenant, looks back on her childhood with deep appreciation for her mother's enthusiasm and commitment to teach her of the Savior. This mother's diligence became her daughter's delight—with an exclamation mark!

### **Give highest priority to family**

Living prophets are clear regarding our sacred duty to teach our children.<sup>7</sup> In a letter issued by the First Presidency, we are instructed "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 activ-

ities may be, they must not be permitted to displace the divinely appointed duties that only parents and families can adequately perform."<sup>8</sup>

Yes, life can be fast-paced for parents and is becoming so for children. It would be easy to say there is not enough time to fit everything in. Looking back at a time that passed all too quickly, I can now see that each day was filled with precious little moments full of opportunity to help our children hear the "voice of gladness" in the gospel. Children are always learning from us. They are learning what is important by what we choose to do, as well as what we choose not to do. Casual, infrequent family prayers, scripture study, and family home evenings will not be enough to fortify our children. Where will children learn the gospel and standards such as chastity, integrity, and honesty if not at home? These values can be reinforced at church, but parents are the most capable and most effective in teaching them to their children.

### Helps in teaching children

Understanding who these children are and their potential in God's kingdom can help us have a greater desire to meet the challenges more patiently—more lovingly. The Lord will help us teach our children if we will do all that is within our power. Families are forever, and the Savior wants us to succeed. As we seek the Spirit, we can receive the comfort, guidance, and reassurance we need to fulfill the responsibilities and receive the blessings of parenthood.

The divinely inspired programs of the Church and those called to minister to our children can help us. My husband and I are grateful for bishops, priesthood and auxiliary leaders, and home and visiting teachers who helped strengthen our family. Whether we have children in our own home or not, each of us can play an important part in assisting parents.

### Children teach their parents

Children are so capable of learning the significant things of the kingdom. As we listen to them, we can better understand how they are applying what they are learning about the gospel. A father explained to his four-year-old daughter that the family had spent most of the day cleaning the house and every room was clean except one.

"Do you know which room is not clean?" he asked her.

"Mine," she quickly replied.

"Do you know anyone who could help clean your room?" he asked, expecting her to answer that she could.

Instead she replied, "Well, Daddy, I know that any time you are scared, worried, or need help, you can get down on your knees and ask Heavenly Father to help."

It is interesting to note that as we listen to our children, they can also teach us. A father shared an experience he had with his eight-year-old daughter. He said:

"While I was contemplating remarks for my sacrament meeting talk on 'Becoming like Little Children,' I asked my daughter why we needed to become like little children. She responded, 'Because we are all little children compared to Jesus, and because little children have a good imagination.'"

Surprised by the last part of her answer, he asked why we need a good imagination. She replied, "So we can imagine Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross, and when we take the sacrament we can think about Him."

### The Savior's example of loving children

As in all things, the Savior set the example in how we should love and teach our children. When He appeared to the Nephites in the Western Hemisphere, the scriptures tell us that as He spoke to the people, "he wept, . . . and he took their lit-

tle children, one by one, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them.”<sup>9</sup>

Referring to this occasion, President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “There is no more tender and beautiful picture in all of sacred writing than this simple language describing the love of the Savior for little children.”<sup>10</sup>

### Invite the Spirit for teaching to be effective

The key to accomplishing effective gospel teaching in the home is to invite the Spirit of the Lord to be with us. Some of the best counsel my husband and I received during some turbulent times of raising our children was to do all that is possible to invite and keep the Spirit in our home. Children cannot learn spiritual things and have spiritual feelings without the guidance of the Spirit.

As parents, we can share our testimony of Jesus Christ with our children often. The bearing of testimony, whether during family home evening or in a teaching moment, will invite the Spirit. President Boyd K. Packer also instructs us to “teach our young people to bear testimony—to bear testimony that Jesus is the Christ, that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God, that the Book of Mormon is true.”<sup>11</sup>

President Hinckley reassures us: “Of all the joys of life, none other equals that of happy parenthood. Of all the responsi-

bilities with which we struggle, none other is so serious. To rear children in an atmosphere of love, security, and faith is the most rewarding of all challenges.”<sup>12</sup>

I know—with an exclamation mark—that children can receive a witness by the Spirit that brings conviction and commitment to their hearts! I bear witness that this is our charge, this is our opportunity: to diligently teach and testify to our children of the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, that they might also hear the “voice of gladness.” In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### NOTES

1. Doctrine and Covenants 128:19, 23; see also verses 20–22.
2. Doctrine and Covenants 93:40.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 68:28.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 68:25.
5. Enos 1:1.
6. Enos 1:3.
7. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
8. First Presidency letter, 11 Feb. 1999; quoted in *Ensign*, June 1999, 80.
9. 3 Nephi 17:21.
10. In Conference Report, Oct. 1994, 74; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 54.
11. *Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled* (1991), 154.
12. In Conference Report, Oct. 1994, 74; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 54.

## Elder Neal A. Maxwell

### True disciples maintain faith

In the churn of crises and the sinister swirl of global events, true disciples will maintain faith in a revealing, loving God and in His plan for redeeming His children, which plan is the *why* of *all* that God does! (see Moses 1:39). Furthermore, God’s character, as revealed to us, tells us that He has the cosmic capacity to ensure

that He really is “able” to do His immense work (see 2 Nephi 27:20–21; Joseph Smith Translation, Isaiah 29:22–23).

True disciples will also maintain faith in His atoning Son, Jesus Christ, and, by being “converted unto the Lord” (3 Nephi 1:22), will be steadily undergoing a happy and “mighty change” (Mosiah 5:2; Alma 5:12–14).