

Divine Parenting Lessons

By Elder Valeri V. Córdón
Of the Seventy

Parents enter a partnership with their Heavenly Father to guide their precious children back to heaven.

Have you ever held a newborn in your arms? There is a light that emanates from every newborn, bringing a special bond of love that can fill their parents' hearts with joy.¹ A Mexican writer wrote, "I have learned that when a newborn first squeezes his father's finger in his tiny fist, he has caught him forever."²

Parenting is one of life's most extraordinary experiences. Parents enter a partnership with their Heavenly Father to guide their precious children back to heaven.³ Today I would like to share some parenting lessons found in the scriptures and taught by living prophets to help us leave our parental legacy.

Climb to the Higher Ground of Gospel Culture

We must climb to the higher ground of gospel culture with our families. President Russell M. Nelson declared: "Families deserve guidance from heaven. Parents cannot counsel children adequately from personal experience, fear, or sympathy."⁴

Although our cultural backgrounds, parenting styles, and personal experiences may be valuable for parenting, these abilities are insufficient to help our children return to heaven. We need access to a more elevated "set of values and ... practices,"⁵ a culture of both love and expectations, where we interact with our children "in a higher, holier way."⁶ President Dallin H. Oaks described gospel culture as "a distinctive way of life, a set of values and expectations and practices. ... This gospel culture comes from the plan of salvation, the commandments of God, and the teachings of ... living prophets. It guides us in the way we raise our families and live our individual lives."⁷

Jesus Christ is the center of this gospel culture. Adopting the gospel culture in our families is critical to creating a fertile environment where the seed of faith may flourish. To climb to higher ground, President Oaks invited us "to give up any personal or family traditions or practices that are contrary to the teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ."⁸ Parents, timidity on our part to establish gospel culture may allow the adversary to establish a foothold in our homes or, even worse, in the hearts of our children.

As we choose to make the gospel culture the predominant culture in our family, then by the powerful influence of the Holy Ghost,⁹ our current parenting styles, traditions, and practices

will be sifted, aligned, refined, and enhanced.

Make Home the Center of Gospel Learning

President Russell M. Nelson has taught that the home should be the “center of gospel learning.”¹⁰ The purpose of gospel learning is to “deepen our conversion to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ and help us become more like Them.”¹¹ Let’s consider three crucial parenting responsibilities described by prophets and apostles that can help us establish a higher gospel culture in our homes.

First: Teach Freely

Heavenly Father instructed Adam concerning Jesus Christ and His doctrine. He taught him “to teach these things freely unto [his] children.”¹² In other words, Heavenly Father taught Adam to teach these things liberally, generously, and without restraint.¹³ The scriptures tell us that “Adam and Eve blessed the name of God, and they made all things known unto their sons and their daughters.”¹⁴

We teach our children generously when we spend meaningful time with them. We teach without restraint when discussing sensitive topics such as screen time, using resources that the Church has made available.¹⁵ We teach liberally when we study the scriptures with our children using *Come, Follow Me* and allow the Spirit to be the teacher.

Second: Model Discipleship

In the book of John, we read that when several Jews questioned the Savior about His conduct, Jesus directed attention to His model, His Father. He taught, “The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.”¹⁶ Parents, what do we need to model for our children? Discipleship.

As parents, we can teach the importance of putting God first when we discuss the first commandment, but we model it when we set aside worldly distractions and keep the Sabbath day holy every week. We can teach the importance of temple covenants when we speak about the doctrine of celestial marriage, but we model it when we honor our covenants, treating our spouse with dignity.

Third: Invite to Act

Faith in Jesus Christ should be the core of our children’s testimonies, and these testimonies must come to each child through individual revelation.¹⁷ To assist our children with the building of their testimonies, we encourage them to use their agency to choose what is right¹⁸ and prepare them for a lifetime on God’s covenant path.¹⁹

It would be wise to encourage each of our children to accept President Nelson’s invitation to take charge of his or her own testimony of Jesus Christ and His gospel—to work for it, to nurture it so that it will grow, to feed it truth, and to not pollute it with false philosophies of unbelieving men and women.²⁰

Righteous, Intentional Parenting

Our Heavenly Father's divine intentions as a parent were made known in a revelation given to Moses: "For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."²¹ President Nelson has added, "God will do everything He can, short of violating your agency, to help you not miss out on the greatest blessings in all eternity."²²

As parents, we are God's agents in the care of our children.²³ We must do everything we can to create an environment where our children can feel His divine influence.

Heavenly Father never intended for us as parents to sit on the sidelines as spectators, watching the spiritual lives of our children unfold. Let me illustrate this idea of intentional parenting with a personal experience. When I was attending Primary in a small branch in Guatemala, my parents began to teach me about the value of patriarchal blessings. My mother took the time to share her experience of receiving her treasured patriarchal blessing. She taught me the doctrine related to patriarchal blessings, and she testified of promised blessings. Her intentional parenting inspired me to have the desire to receive my patriarchal blessing.

When I was 12, my parents helped me navigate the search for a patriarch. This was necessary because there was no patriarch in the district where we lived. I traveled to a patriarch that was in a stake 156 kilometers (97 miles) away. I distinctly remember when the patriarch laid his hands upon my head to bless me. I knew by powerful spiritual confirmation, without a doubt, that my Heavenly Father knew me.

For a 12-year-old boy from a small town, that meant everything to me. My heart turned to my Heavenly Father that day because of my mother and father's intentional parenting, and I will be forever grateful to them.

Sister Joy D. Jones, former Primary General President, taught: "We cannot wait for conversion to simply happen to our children. Accidental conversion is *not* a principle of the gospel of Jesus Christ."²⁴ Our love and inspired invitations can make a difference in how our children use their agency. President Nelson emphasized, "No other work transcends that of righteous, intentional parenting!"²⁵

Conclusion

Parents, this world is full of philosophies, cultures, and ideas competing for our children's attention. The great and spacious building advertises its membership daily using the most current media channels. "But in the gift of his Son," the prophet Moroni taught, "hath God prepared a more excellent way."²⁶

As we partner with God through covenants and become His agents in the care of our children, He will sanctify our intentions, inspire our teachings, and temper our invitations so "our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins."²⁷ In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Psalm 127:3.

2. Johnny Welch, “The Puppet,” reproduced at inspire21.com/thepuppet; see also Johnny Welch, *Lo que me ha enseñado la vida* (1996).
3. This may seem like a daunting task, but as Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said, “With a Heavenly Father’s help we can leave more of a parental legacy than we suppose” (“The Hands of the Fathers,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 15; *Liahona*, July 1999, 18).
4. Russell M. Nelson, “Thou Shalt Have No Other Gods,” *Ensign*, May 1996, 15.
5. Dallin H. Oaks, “The Gospel Culture,” *Ensign*, Mar. 2012, 42; *Liahona*, Mar. 2012, 22.
6. Russell M. Nelson, “Peacemakers Needed,” *Liahona*, May 2023, 99.
7. Dallin H. Oaks, “The Gospel Culture,” *Ensign*, Mar. 2012, 42; *Liahona*, Mar. 2012, 22.
8. Dallin H. Oaks, “The Gospel Culture,” *Ensign*, Mar. 2012, 42; *Liahona*, Mar. 2012, 22.
9. See Moroni 10:5.
10. Russell M. Nelson, “Becoming Exemplary Latter-day Saints,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 113.
11. “Conversion Is Our Goal,” in *Come, Follow Me—For Individuals and Families: New Testament 2023*, v.
12. Moses 6:58.
13. See *American Dictionary of the English Language*, “freely,” webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/freely.
14. Moses 5:12.
15. See “Taking Charge of Technology” and *For the Strength of Youth: A Guide for Making Choices* (2022), Gospel Library.
16. John 5:19.
17. See “Matthew 16:17–18. Individual Revelation Needed for a Testimony of Jesus Christ,” in *New Testament Student Manual* (2018), 52.
18. See Dale G. Renlund, “Choose You This Day,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 104: “Our Heavenly Father’s goal in parenting is not to have His children *do* what is right; it is to have His children *choose* to do what is right and ultimately become like Him.”
19. See “Appendix: Preparing Your Children for a Lifetime on God’s Covenant Path,” in *Come, Follow Me—For Individuals and Families: New Testament 2023*, Gospel Library.
20. See Russell M. Nelson, “Overcome the World and Find Rest,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2022, 97.
21. Moses 1:39. In this verse, Jesus Christ is speaking on behalf of Heavenly Father.
22. Russell M. Nelson, “Choices for Eternity” (worldwide devotional for young adults), May 15, 2022, Gospel Library.

23. See Russell M. Nelson, “Salvation and Exaltation,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2008, 10: “Do not try to control your children. Instead, listen to them, help them to learn the gospel, inspire them, and lead them toward eternal life. You are God’s agents in the care of children He has entrusted to you. Let His divine influence remain in your hearts as you teach and persuade.”
24. Joy D. Jones, “Essential Conversations,” *Liahona*, May 2021, 12.
25. Russell M. Nelson, “The Sabbath Is a Delight,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2015, 131.
26. Ether 12:11.
27. 2 Nephi 25:26.