

The Sacred Responsibilities of Parenthood

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It is a privilege for Sister Ballard and me to be with you today. I commend you for your desire to further your gospel education by spending a few days here at BYU. This campus has been specifically dedicated to the revealed truth that “the glory of God is intelligence” (D&C 93:36) and “whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life . . . will rise with us in the resurrection” (D&C 130:18). I pray that what I say may help us grow together spiritually as we discuss the sacred responsibilities of parenthood and “Family: ‘Central to the Creator’s Plan.’”

I want you to know that I endorse this theme for Education Week. I have profound respect for the family in a global sense and in an intimate, personal sense. As you know, that phrase—“central to the Creator’s plan”—comes from the introductory paragraph of “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” (*Ensign*, November 1995, 102). Please allow me to read the entire text of that sentence:

We, the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children.

As a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, I participated in the process of drafting that inspired document. It was a remarkable experience for all of us. As we travel the world, we see things—both within the Church and outside the Church. We were troubled by much of what we were seeing. We could see the people of the world wanting to define the family in ways contrary to God’s eternal plan for the happiness of His children. Various world conferences were held dealing either directly or indirectly with the family. Major agenda items were introduced by some delegates that would have greatly weakened the family; yet, through the significant contributions of Church leaders, members, and other like-minded people, the language and thus the effects of those proposals were softened.

In the midst of all that was stirring on this subject in the world, the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles could see the importance of declaring to the world the revealed, true role of the family in the eternal

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plan of God. We worked together through the divinely inspired council system that operates even at the highest levels of the Church to craft a proclamation that would make the Lord's position on the family so clear that it could not be misunderstood.

In introducing "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" at the General Relief Society Meeting in September 1995, President Gordon B. Hinckley said:

*With so much of sophistry that is passed off as truth, with so much of deception concerning standards and values, with so much of allurements and enticement to take on the slow stain of the world, we have felt to warn and forewarn. In furtherance of this we of the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles now issue a proclamation to the Church and to the world as a declaration and reaffirmation of standards, doctrines, and practices relative to the family which the prophets, seers, and revelators of this church have repeatedly stated throughout its history. ["Stand Strong Against the Wiles of the World," *Ensign*, November 1995, 100]*

After reading the proclamation, President Hinckley concluded:

We commend to all a careful, thoughtful, and prayerful reading of this proclamation. The strength of any nation is rooted within the walls of its homes. We urge our people everywhere to strengthen their families in conformity with these time-honored values. ["Stand Strong," 101]

Since the proclamation came out eight years ago, time has overwhelmingly proven its prophetic insight. As a church we are more focused than ever in supporting and strengthening the family. Sadly, the family continues to be assaulted relentlessly throughout the world. You only need to read a newspaper or turn on the television to see how openly and viciously the war against the family is being waged.

Gender is being confused, and gender roles are being repudiated. Same-gender marriage is being promoted in direct opposition to one of God's primary purposes for His children to experience mortality.

The family is not just the basic unit of society; it is the basic unit of eternity. We lived as Heavenly Father's spirit sons and daughters before this mortal existence. In that grand pre-mortal family council, our Heavenly Father's plan for the eternal happiness and peace of His children was presented. We understood that we would come to this earth to live as families, and through the sealing authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood we could live throughout the rest of eternity as families.

It is alarming to see how intensely and openly the family is under attack in contemporary society. The proclamation is very clear:

We declare that God's commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. We further declare that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife. . . .

. . . Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity. Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. ["The Family," 102]

We must stand firm, brothers and sisters, at this time when the adversary is using differing lifestyles in an attempt to replace the marriage of one man to one woman. It would be well for all people of the world to read the full text of the proclamation.

The attacks on the family also undermine the value of life—particularly the life of the unborn. Life is being trivialized and subjected to the vacillating whims of convenience and political correctness. You will find it troubling as I do that between 1950 and 1997, some 46

industrialized countries and nine developing nations legalized or removed most restrictions on abortion. Each year an estimated 46 million abortions take place worldwide. Indeed, some estimate that induced abortions end one-fourth of all pregnancies.

Far too many people view marriage as a “couples relationship,” designed to fulfill the emotional needs of adults rather than an institution for rearing children. Children are considered a choice rather than a blessing. About 1 million children per year experience parental divorce and its aftermath, and about one-third of all children in America are born out of wedlock. Almost every trend indicates that we are on a slippery slope downward from God’s plan for His children. The family, once universally hailed as the cornerstone of society, is losing its essential role.

When you stop and think about it, from a diabolically tactical point of view, fighting the family makes sense. When Satan wants to disrupt the work of the Lord, he doesn’t poison the world’s peanut butter supply, thus bringing the Church’s missionary system to its collective knees. He doesn’t send a plague of laryngitis to afflict the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. He doesn’t legislate against green Jell-O or casseroles. When Satan truly wants to disrupt the work of the Lord, he attempts to confuse gender and attacks God’s plan for His spirit children. He works to drive a wedge of disharmony between a father and a mother. He entices children to be disobedient to their parents. He makes family home evening and family prayer inconvenient. He suggests family scripture study is impractical and not doable. That’s all it takes, because Satan knows that the surest and most effective way to disrupt the Lord’s work is to diminish the effectiveness of the family and the sanctity of the home.

Look at what he accomplishes when he does that. Couples unhappy in their marriages tend *not* to give appropriate gospel instruction in the home, both through formal family home

evening lessons and through exemplary living. They are less likely to be committed to gospel principles in their own lives. Some drift from the Church. Apathy can overcome even the active members, keeping them away from the temple and weakening their capacity to be effective leaders and teachers—thus leaving countless lives untouched and slowing the Lord’s work. And the Internet, when *not* properly used, is a vicious influence in the home. So we know, without question, Lucifer is the enemy of the family!

Many of you will remember that I have spoken at some length recently about the need to raise up the greatest generation of missionaries in history. Conditions in today’s world demand a missionary corps of young men and women filled with faith and deeply anchored testimonies of the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ through the Prophet Joseph Smith. They need to be like Helaman and his 2,000 stripling warriors, young men who “were exceedingly valiant for courage, and also for strength and activity; but behold, this was not all—they were men who were true at all times in whatsoever thing they were entrusted” (Alma 53:20).

Helaman explained the power of these young men:

Now they never had fought, yet they did not fear death; and they did think more upon the liberty of their fathers than they did upon their lives; yea, they had been taught by their mothers, that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them.

And they rehearsed unto me the words of their mothers, saying: We do not doubt our mothers knew it. [Alma 56:47–48; emphasis added]

Our youth need steadfast, courageous mothers—and they need fathers like Enos had. As you will recall, Enos was Lehi’s grandson, the son of Jacob. Enos recorded that his father was “a just man” who “taught me in his language, and also in the nurture and admonition

of the Lord—and blessed be the name of my God for it” (Enos 1:1).

The scriptural record seems to suggest that Enos had a spiritual change of heart one day while hunting. He wrote that during this quiet time alone, “the words which I had often heard my father speak concerning eternal life, and the joy of the saints, sunk deep into my heart” (Enos 1:3).

Notice that this moment of spiritual enlightenment did not come at the height of a lecture from a concerned father to a troubled son. As important as those occasional lectures are, they rarely result in immediate long-term change. Nor did it come in the midst of one of Jacob’s great gospel sermons. It may be that Jacob wasn’t even alive to enjoy his son’s spiritual rebirth. None of that matters. The important thing is Jacob made sure that he taught his son “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Enos heard, and eventually he understood. And, as Enos said, “blessed be the name of my God for it.”

Alma was one of the great Book of Mormon prophets. His son, also named Alma, rebelled against everything he was taught. According to the record, Alma the Younger was “a very wicked and an idolatrous man. And he was a man of many words, and did speak much flattery to the people; therefore he led many of the people to do after the manner of his iniquities” (Mosiah 27:8).

As a result of the faith and prayers of his righteous father, Alma the Younger had a remarkable experience. It brought him to the knowledge of the truth. He explained:

And it came to pass that as I was thus racked with torment, while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins, behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world.

Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God,

have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.

And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.
[Alma 36:17–19]

A father’s prayers made a difference in the life of Alma the Younger. A father’s teachings eventually had impact upon the life of his wayward son.

As with these scriptural examples, so with us. What we do and what we teach in our homes and in our families matters. With the proclamation as the primary text, let me share with you five concepts that will help insure happy and secure families.

1. Full and Equal Partnerships

Men and women joined together in marriage need to work together as a full partnership. However, a full and equal partnership between men and women does not imply the roles played by the two sexes are the same in God’s grand design for His children. As clearly stated in the proclamation on the family, men and women, though spiritually equal, are entrusted with different but equally significant roles. These roles complement each other. Men are given stewardship over the sacred ordinances of the priesthood. To women, God gives stewardship over bestowing and nurturing mortal life, including providing physical bodies for God’s spirit children and guiding those children toward a knowledge of gospel truths. These stewardships, equally sacred and important, do not involve any false ideas about domination or subordination. Each stewardship is essential for the spiritual progression of all family members—parents and children alike.

Family stewardships thus must be understood in terms of obligations and responsibilities—of love, service, and interdependence. Men who attempt to dominate their wives,

who seek to exercise unrighteous dominion without regard to spousal counsel and sensitivities, simply don't understand that such actions are contrary to God's will. President Gordon B. Hinckley has made that abundantly clear:

*Some men who are evidently unable to gain respect by the goodness of their lives, use as justification for their actions the statement that Eve was told that Adam should rule over her. How much sadness, how much tragedy, how much heartbreak has been caused through centuries of time by weak men who have used that as a scriptural warrant for atrocious behavior! They do not recognize that the same account indicates that Eve was given as a helpmeet to Adam. The facts are that they stood side by side in the garden. They were expelled from the garden together, and they worked together, side by side. [Gordon B. Hinckley, "Our Solemn Responsibilities," *Ensign*, November 1991, 51]*

It is within the family that divine potential is best realized for both men and women. The blessings and responsibilities of parenthood permit mothers and fathers to act, albeit imperfectly, in a new physical and spiritual relationship that draws them within God's purposes for their lives.

2. Fathers

The proclamation states: "Fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families" ("The Family," 102). They teach their families the gospel and lead in kindness, following the counsel found in section 121 of the Doctrine and Covenants (see D&C 121:34–46).

They perform priesthood ordinances and give priesthood blessings, including father's blessings, to their children. They pray for and with family members, collectively and individually. They set an example of respect and love for their eternal companion and the mother of their children. In all things they follow the

example of the Savior and strive to be worthy of His name and His blessing. Fathers should seek constantly for guidance from the Holy Ghost so they will know what to do, what to say, and also know what *not* to do and what *not* to say. They serve the family and the Church in the spirit of love and enthusiasm, by example preparing family members to serve—especially preparing sons to serve as worthy missionaries.

Part of the father's role in presiding in the home involves learning about each individual's needs and aspirations. Brigham Young advised parents to "study their [children's] dispositions and their temperaments, and deal with them accordingly" (JD 19:221).

Fathers are expected by God and His prophets not only to provide for their families but also to protect them. Dangers of all sorts abound in the world in which we live. Physical protection against natural or man-made hazards is important.

Moral dangers are also all around us, confronting our children from their early years. Fathers play a vital role in protecting children against such snares. It is sad to note that children in single-parent families are more likely to drop out of high school, to get pregnant as teenagers, to abuse drugs, to be physically or sexually abused as children, and to be in trouble with the law than are those from families with both biological parents present.

We know that a father's role does not end with presiding, providing, and protecting family members. On a day-to-day basis, fathers can and should help with the essential nurturing and bonding associated with feeding, playing, storytelling, loving, and all the rest of the activities that make up family life. And grandfathers continue their shepherding role as long as they live.

3. Mothers

The proclamation teaches that "mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children" ("The Family," 102). Nurturing refers

to parenting behaviors such as warmth, support, bonding, attachment, recognizing each child's unique needs and abilities, and attending to children's needs. Nurturing in and of itself is more important in the development of a child than is any particular method or technique of child rearing. It hardly needs saying that nurturing is best carried out in a stable, safe family context.

More than half a century ago, the First Presidency proclaimed, "Motherhood is near to divinity. It is the highest, holiest service to be assumed by mankind. It places her who honors its holy calling and service next to the angels" (CR, October 1942, 12–13).

A mother's nurturing love arouses in children, from their earliest days on earth, an awakening of the memories of love and goodness they experienced in their premortal existence. Because our mothers love us, we learn, or, more accurately, remember, that God also loves us. President Thomas S. Monson said, "One cannot forget mother and remember God. One cannot remember mother and forget God. Why? Because these two sacred persons, God and mother, partners in creation, in love, in sacrifice, in service, are as one" ("Behold Thy Mother," *Ensign*, April 1998, 6).

Today there is significant pressure in our materialistic world to have and to spend more money. Unfortunately this draws married mothers to work outside the home to provide a second family income. As husbands, wives, and children recognize the difference between basic necessities and material wants—as manifest in the choice of house, household furnishings, car, entertainment, travel, etc.—they lessen family financial burdens and contribute to helping mothers be at home. Decisions about working outside the home are difficult ones and need to be made prayerfully, keeping ever in mind the counsel of the living prophets on this complex issue. President Gordon B. Hinckley, with his usual sensitive, loving spirit, gave us this wise perspective:

Some years ago President Benson delivered a message to the women of the Church. He encouraged them to leave their employment and give their individual time to their children. I sustain the position which he took.

Nevertheless, I recognize, as he recognized, that there are some women (it has become very many in fact) who have to work to provide for the needs of their families. To you I say, do the very best you can. I hope that if you are employed full-time you are doing it to ensure that basic needs are met and not simply to indulge a taste for an elaborate home, fancy cars, and other luxuries. The greatest job that any mother will ever do will be in nurturing, teaching, lifting, encouraging, and rearing her children in righteousness and truth. None other can adequately take her place.

*It is well-nigh impossible to be a full-time homemaker and a full-time employee. I know how some of you struggle with decisions concerning this matter. I repeat, do the very best you can. You know your circumstances, and I know that you are deeply concerned for the welfare of your children. [Gordon B. Hinckley, "Women of the Church," *Ensign*, November 1996, 69; emphasis added]*

President Hinckley's counsel raises significant questions about time pressures on mothers. Taking care of small, dependent, and demanding children is never-ending and often nerve-racking. Mothers must not fall into the trap of believing that "quality" time can replace "quantity" time. Quality is a direct function of quantity—and mothers, to nurture their children properly, must provide both. To do so requires constant vigilance and a constant juggling of competing demands. It is hard work, no doubt about it.

Sometimes you sisters may feel like the Brethren do not appreciate you and the important contribution you make to your families and to the work of the Lord. Perhaps if husbands and fathers experienced what someone suggested might be planned for the next *Survivor* show, it would make a difference:

Six men will be dropped on an island with one van and four children each—for six weeks. Each child plays two sports and either takes music or dance classes. There is no access to fast food.

Each man must take care of his four children, keep his assigned house clean, correct all homework, complete science projects, cook, do laundry, etc.

The men only have access to television when the children are asleep and all chores are done: There is only one TV, and there is no remote control.

The men must put on makeup daily, applying it themselves either while driving or while making four lunches. They must attend weekly PTA meetings; clean up after their sick children at 3:00 a.m.; make an Indian hut model with six toothpicks, a tortilla, and one marker; and get a four-year-old to eat a serving of peas.

The children vote them off the island based on performance. The winner is the first one voted off who gets to go back to work. [Various versions available on the World Wide Web]

Although that may be slightly exaggerated, it does convey a vivid picture of the demands of motherhood. Never doubt, sisters, that you are the heart of the home. Your attitude—whether happy, sad, positive, or negative—will likely be reflected in the feelings of your husband and your children.

President James E. Faust has given very wise counsel:

Women today are being encouraged by some to have it all—generally, all simultaneously: money, travel, marriage, motherhood, and separate careers in the world. . . .

*Doing things sequentially—filling roles one at a time at different times—is not always possible, as we know, but it gives a woman the opportunity to do each thing well in its time and to fill a variety of roles in her life. A woman . . . may fit more than one career into the various seasons of life. She need not try to sing all the verses of her song at the same time. [“A Message to My Granddaughters: Becoming ‘Great Women’,” *Ensign*, September 1986, 18, 19]*

And grandmothers continue their nurturing role as long as they live.

4. Principles for Marriage and Families

Let me quote again from the proclamation: “Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities” (“The Family,” 102). Parents should work to create loving, eternal connections with their children. Reproof or correction will, to be sure, sometimes be required. But it must be done sensitively, persuasively, with “an increase of love” thereafter, “lest [the child] esteem [the parent] to be his enemy” (D&C 121:43). (See Craig H. Hart, “Three Essential Parenting Principles,” in *Family Focus*, *BYU Magazine*, spring 2003, 58.)

It can be equally destructive when parents are too permissive and overindulge their children, allowing them to do as they please. Parents need to set limits in accordance with the importance of the matter involved and the child’s disposition and maturity. Don’t make mountains out of molehills, and don’t produce what to a child seems an interminably long list of rules. Help children understand the reasons for rules, and always follow through with appropriate discipline when rules are broken. It is important as well to praise appropriate behavior. It will challenge all of your creativity and patience to maintain this balance, but the rewards will be great. Children who understand their boundaries through the consistent application of important rules are more likely to do well at school, to be more self-controlled, and to be more willing to abide by the laws of the land (from Hart, “Three Principles,” 59).

Parents need to be consistent and loving, taking into account each child’s unique nature and disposition; setting appropriate limits to acceptable behavior, including modest dress, clean language, and dignified appearance; and then allowing each child his or her needed

autonomy. Children are better prepared for the inevitable day when they leave home if parents “teach them correct principles and they [learn to] govern themselves” (Joseph Smith, quoted by John Taylor in “The Organization of the Church,” *Millennial Star* 13, no. 22 [15 November 1851]: 339; James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency*, 6 vols. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966–75], 3:54; also see *JD* 10:57–58).

Helping children learn how to make decisions requires that parents give them a measure of autonomy, dependent on the age and maturity of the child and the situation at hand. Parents need to give children choices and should be prepared to appropriately adjust some rules, thus preparing children for real-world situations (see Hart, “Three Principles,” 59). To do this, parents must listen—really listen—to what their children are saying. They must know what is important to each child. I learned this lesson years ago from one of our daughters. She was only four or five at the time. She came into the room all excited. I was reading the newspaper, and she had something very much on her mind that was important to her. I was responding, “Yes. Uh-huh. Uh-huh.” All of a sudden the newspaper came crashing down under her two little hands. She grabbed my face between her hands so that she could look me right in the eye. This was a little four- or five-year-old teaching her father a great lesson: “Daddy, you’re not listening to me.” And she was right.

Parents, let’s listen and know what is important in the lives of our children. If we fail to listen, if we don’t try to understand their point of view, how can we expect them to come to us for guidance in making important decisions?

5. Family Councils

As you would expect to hear from me, one of the best tools we have at our disposal as parents is the family council. I cannot emphasize enough its importance in helping to understand and address challenges in the family. When members

of one family began to feel unusual contention invading their home, they called a family council to discuss the situation. The father and then the mother explained to their children what they had observed and asked how each felt about it. The mother and father learned that since their two oldest children had left home—one to be married and one to go to college—an unfair burden of responsibility had been unwittingly shifted to the two oldest children remaining at home, and they were becoming resentful. By counseling together and listening to what their children were feeling, a more equitable distribution of responsibility was made among the children, resolving much of the frustration and tension in the home (see M. Russell Ballard, *Counseling with Our Councils* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997], 154).

I recognize that there are as many kinds of family councils as there are different kinds of families. Family councils can consist of one parent and one child, of two parents and several children, of just two parents, or of just siblings, etc. Regardless of the size or makeup of the family council, what really matters are loving motivation, an atmosphere that encourages free and open discussion, and a willingness to listen to the honest input of all council members—as well as to the whisperings of the Holy Spirit (see Ballard, *Counseling*, 157).

Family councils can be a blessing in the lives of families and individual family members in this life and through the eternities. Through them we can draw closer to our families and closer to God. They provide a unique opportunity for fathers and mothers to extend their loving influence in important ways (see Ballard, *Counseling*, 158).

As our families counsel together with the understanding that we are the family of God, we come to know that He loves us. We are precious to Him. He cares. He wants to help us. He wants to give us the support and help that we need in times of crisis. Much of that support and strength comes through counseling with one another (see Ballard, *Counseling*, 160).

We need to remember that our families are imperfect because they are made up of imperfect people. Still, there are things we can do to improve our families and each individual who lives within them as we move forward together toward fulfilling the Creator's eternal plan for us. In all that we do, we must always remember that the voice of the Spirit is an essential component—and it is a still, small voice. God's most significant messages come quietly, softly, sweetly. Barbara and I have raised seven children, and there have been some traumatic, difficult challenges through the years. Through my wife's influence, there has been a spirit of calmness in our family even when times were tough. She has taught me through firsthand, personal experience that you cannot teach nor cradle nor weld together a celestial, eternal family if there is contention in the home.

If any of you are struggling with contention in your homes, you can change this. Talk to your family. Ask for their help. Tell them you don't want a contentious spirit in the home anymore and discuss what each family member can do to prevent it. More than 20 years ago, President Marion G. Romney taught:

*I feel certain that if, in our homes, parents will read from the Book of Mormon prayerfully and regularly, both by themselves and with their children, the spirit of that great book will come to permeate our homes and all who dwell therein. The spirit of reverence will increase; mutual respect and consideration for each other will grow. The spirit of contention will depart. ["The Book of Mormon," *Ensign*, May 1980, 67]*

Let the spirit in the home reflect the attitude of the still, small voice. It is this spirit that will imbue us with sufficient spiritual strength to feel confident and patient in our family relationships. In that same 1980 conference address, President Romney declared:

If we would avoid adopting the evils of the world, we must pursue a course which will daily feed our minds with and call them back to the things of the Spirit. I know of no better way to do this than by daily reading the Book of Mormon. ["The Book of Mormon," 66]

We have spoken together today about fundamental, guiding principles for our homes and families—about full and equal partnerships, roles of fathers and mothers, principles for marriage and families, and family councils. Remember, also, there is great power in prayer. I strongly encourage personal and family prayer—which are important in building strong families—but I want to emphasize something else as well. I'm wondering if many of you parents—you couples—have lost that essential moment of kneeling together at the end of the day, just the two of you, holding hands and saying your prayers. If that has slipped away from your daily routine, may I suggest you put it back—beginning tonight!

This is a great time to thank the Lord for your companion and for your children and for one more day together. My wife and I have had that practice for more than 50 years now. When it is her night to pray, she offers a simple, wonderful prayer of gratitude; and when it is mine, I hope it is the same. I want to bear witness to you that it makes a difference. I do not believe Lucifer can penetrate a marriage, or cause discord and misunderstanding within a marriage and the family, when parents take time to pray together. Don't try to work through the daily challenges of life without kneeling together and calling down the blessings of heaven into your marriage and your family, letting Heavenly Father help you get from where you are to where you would like to be.

My remarks today have been primarily focused on the sacred roles of fathers and mothers. Please do not think I am unmindful or uncaring about the many married persons

who have been denied the blessings of parenthood through no fault of their own. I am also well aware of the heart-wrenching sorrow of so many who walk the paths of life alone without a faithful companion at their side. I testify to you, as a servant of God, that no meaningful blessing related to marriage and family will be denied you in the eternities if you will be strong, be loving, and stay faithful. Pray always. He will hear and answer your prayers “in his own time, and in his own way, and according to his own will” (D&C 88:68). And never underestimate the influence for good you can be in the life of a sister, a niece, a brother, or a nephew.

In conclusion, to parents everywhere, my counsel is simple: Get a copy of “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.” Read it and strive to align your marriage and your family

to its inspired, revealed direction from the Lord. Then, be the very best and act the very best you can. God will give you strength beyond your own as you strive daily to fulfill the most sacred mortal responsibility He gives to His children. Listen to the voice of the Spirit and the counsel of the living prophets. Be of good cheer. God did not place you on earth to fail, and your efforts as parents will not be counted as failure unless you give up.

May our Heavenly Father bless each and every one of you. May the peace of the Lord abide in your own hearts and overflow into your homes and families. I leave you my testimony that God lives. We are His children. Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior. They love us and want us to be faithful and happy. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.