

Protect Our Homes, Renew Our Powers

SHIRLEY R. KLEIN

I love the Book of Mormon! I first read it from cover to cover the summer I turned 13. There was a lot I didn't understand, but I remember distinctly that I did not enjoy the descriptions about the wars. Since then I have read the book many times. Usually I have skimmed the parts about the wars, especially the lengthy section in the last 20 chapters of Alma. I have wondered, "Why does someone like me need to know all this detail about the wars between the Lamanites and Nephites?"

This past year as I taught Sunday School to the 16- and 17-year-olds, we came once again to Mormon's account of these fierce wars. This time when I studied, I came across *Mormon's Map* by BYU professor emeritus John Sorenson and decided to follow Mormon's descriptions of the geography of the wars.¹ As I did so, I noticed several important patterns:

First, the battles were between people who were either for or against the kingdom of God.

Second, the enemy attacked the edges before the main center of Zarahemla was finally captured.

Third, the attacks were unrelenting over a period of time.

Fourth, dissenters from within the Nephites were most effective in helping the enemies succeed.

Fifth, and finally, the attacks initially gave the Nephites a cause, but eventually they lost sight of their goals.

Why did Mormon include this long history of warfare at this important time just before the Savior's birth and subsequent appearance on the American continent? I believe one reason is to help us recognize the "war" we are waging today—once again just before the coming of the Savior. When the invitation was extended to speak at a devotional, I knew exactly what I wanted to talk about.

Today I would like to talk about the war we are waging to defend our homes. Our social fabric has been attacked around the edges, and now it is moving to the center—our homes! I'll use Moroni's strategies of preparing places of security to suggest ways to protect our homes and renew our powers today. But before we talk about how we will defend our homes, I would first like to describe the battle as I see it and what I mean by *home*.

Shirley R. Klein was a BYU associate professor of family life when this devotional address was given on 5 April 2005.

The War We Are Waging

How are our homes and families being attacked at the edges? We are experiencing unprecedented prosperity and access to information, travel, and communication. In most ways these advances are blessings, and we surely would not want to return to the way people used to experience everyday life. An example of the home-front battles that were fought in the early days of the Church is found in Ann Howell Burt's journal. Sister Burt emigrated from Wales, married, and lived in a dugout in the summer of 1863. As a young mother she had to work hard to keep order and see to the needs of her family. She recorded in her journal:

For several mornings I was puzzled to find my milk-pan skimmed. . . . So the other evening I sat down behind the door, with my knitting, to watch proceedings, and what was my surprise to see a huge bull-snake come crawling out from the head of our bed and swaying gracefully toward my crude cupboard . . . to skim my cream.

Now I cover my milk tightly.²

Personally, I think I would have done more than cover my milk, and maybe she did, but this was just one of many episodes during that summer. Her journal continues:

This is a hideous place. Some days ago, I killed a rattlesnake with my rolling pin, as he came crawling down the steps. I was just cooking supper and the baby was on the floor or rather the ground. . . . I was badly frightened. . . .

. . . A few days ago, while keeping the flies off the baby's face as he slept . . . , I discovered . . . a large tarantula crawling toward the child. I seized the broomstick, thrust the end of it at the tarantula and when it took hold . . . I hurriedly put it into the fire.³

We usually don't have to worry about actual tarantulas and snakes invading our houses; instead, we have even more danger-

ous influences threatening us. Unlike Sister Burt's invaders, our tarantulas and snakes are moral ones, and they are ever so subtle. Our modern advances have brought us the Internet; TV; DVDs; the erosion of marriage through divorce, cohabitation, same-sex marriage, and abortion; the difficulty of holding family meal-times; the clothing we wear; our cultural disdain for household work; and changing roles for mothers and fathers. It would be nice if we could beat these invaders back with rolling pins and broomsticks, but literally it's not possible—and figuratively we've lost many of our rolling pins and brooms. Let me explain.

In 2005 it is normal to hear young women describe their goals for the future in terms of exciting careers they plan to pursue. These girls most likely also desire to be wives and mothers, but today it seems more appropriate to announce career goals first. Although we value these opportunities for women, motherhood and homemaking suffer. Mothering and creating homes are knitted tightly together, but in recent years they have disappeared from American society as natural and valued pathways for women. Instead the message seems to be that if mothers have access to modern conveniences to care for their homes and families, then they should be free to seek their own fulfillment. Women and men often end up in conflict over the seemingly burdensome work in the home because they want to pursue personal interests and activities. Home is often erroneously considered a place from which women need to break free. Some ideologies would have women think that home duties limit their full potential, and women *and* men are tempted to disregard the important, everyday aspects of homelife—thus the loss of our rolling pins and brooms.

Modern conveniences *have* delivered us from the days of dugouts, chamber pots, smoke, fleas, mud, rattlesnakes, and tarantulas, but at the same time, American homelife is in

a state of decline. Author Cheryl Mendelson explains:

Homes today often seem to operate on an ad hoc basis. Washday is any time anyone throws a load into the machine. . . . Meals occur any time or all the time or . . . never. . . .

. . . Many people lead deprived lives in houses filled with material luxury. . . .

. . . As people turn more and more to outside institutions to have their [everyday] needs met . . . , [our] skills and expectations . . . diminish, in turn decreasing the chance that people's homes can satisfy their needs. The result is far too many people who long for home even though they seem to have one.⁴

Elder L. Tom Perry reminds us:

We need to make our homes a place of refuge from the storm. . . . Even if the smallest openings are left unattended, negative influences can penetrate the very walls of our homes.⁵

Today it seems that we live in houses without walls—or at least walls that offer protection from the outside world as our own types of tarantulas and snakes enter into our bedrooms, kitchens, and living rooms.⁶

In general conference 25 years ago, President Spencer W. Kimball warned:

Many of the social restraints which in the past have helped to reinforce and to shore up the family are dissolving and disappearing. The time will come when only those who believe deeply and actively in the family will be able to preserve their families in the midst of the gathering evil around us.⁷

It is clear that social restraints that have helped reinforce family life are eroding and creating openings that devalue and dismiss precious time and activities in our homes. One study of 32 families in Los Angeles showed that in several of the homes the whole family

was *never* in the same room during the entire observation period. On average the rest of the families gathered in the same room just 16 percent of the time.⁸

This is your day. The battle for your homes is real. To preserve your family you will need to believe deeply and actively in family life in the home and take action.

When I talk about home, I am talking to every person present, because we all create a home for ourselves. Home is not only something in the far distant future or a place you are from. There are many different ideas about what home is. Family researcher Sarah Allen suggests that home is a geographic center (1) where you have feelings of comfort, familiarity, and safety; (2) where meaningful people and things meet; (3) where significant events, memories, and routines take place; (4) where you develop specific knowledge, such as where to shop and find a bank or what sounds at night are normal; and (5) home is a space that “fits” with who you think you are and meets your expectations for a home place.⁹ Where you live right now could qualify as home, and you can begin now to value it and form habits to help you create the home of your dreams. I challenge you to do something today to make your current home a place of comfort where you can enjoy meaningful people and events.

Making Home a Sacred Center

You are a remarkable group of young people. Some of you will be leaving BYU in the next weeks and months and begin in earnest to create your homes. You will create a home that is unique. I hope you will withstand the attacks of the adversary and defend the sacred time and activities inside your homes. Let me suggest how you can apply Moroni's strategies of preparing places of security to successfully defend your homes and progress toward your eternal goals.

First, like Moroni, dig a deep ditch and pile up ridges of dirt around your home as you

dig deep to discover and preserve the sacred nature of your home and its purposes. In the Bible Dictionary we read, “Only the home can compare with the temple in sacredness.”¹⁰ If our homes compare to the temple, what is it about the home that makes it sacred? Listen to the dictionary meaning of “sacred”: “belonging to or dedicated to God; worthy of reverence; set apart for or dedicated to some person, object, or purpose; that [which] must not be violated or disregarded; properly immune, as from violence or interference.”¹¹

Apply this idea of sacred to everyday activities in your home such as mealtime, prayer, scripture study, music, caring for your home and yard, recreation, laundry, and everything else that takes place in and around your home. These activities have purpose and must not be disregarded or interfered with, because the home setting gives us opportunities to develop and practice character virtues and ethical behavior. Families can learn about moral truths and practice honesty, patience, brotherly kindness, and charity in their daily interactions. The settings of everyday work and recreation in the home provide rich contexts for children and adults to make choices and practice. For example, a child, spouse, or even a roommate may choose to contribute in the home by seeing what needs to be done and doing it happily. Or they may wait to be asked and then complain about the inconvenience.

Everyday events in our home can seem so simple that we overlook the importance of them—like the children of Israel who were smitten by a plague of snakes. To be healed they just had to *look* at the serpent of brass on a pole (see Numbers 21:8–9), but because it was so simple, many did not do it. In 1 Nephi 17:41 we read, “Because of the simpleness of the way, or the easiness of it, there were many who perished.” Everyday activities in our homes may be simple, but because they are simple, frequent, and repeated they offer important opportunities to build individuals and families.

Begin now to form habits of recognizing the sacred nature of everyday life. You don’t need to wait until you have children or make mortgage payments.

I’ll illustrate with the example of mealtime. Our modern technological age has created a speeded up sense of time, and everything we do seems accelerated—what we do, good or bad, can be done faster, easier, and cheaper. For example, it is easier for us individually to graze in our kitchens, dine from our dashboards, or go to the nearest restaurant for a quick meal rather than go to the trouble of preparing a meal and sitting down together. According to Tom Van Aman, executive vice president for Retail Measurement Product Management at Information Resources, Inc., in Chicago, “Meal preparation time dropped from three hours per day in 1960 to twenty minutes in 1998.”¹² Author Jean Zimmerman comments, “Americans [seem to have] bought the argument that we no longer have time to cook—and, even if we did have time, it was drudgery we’d rather avoid in preference of leisure activities.”¹³

What are we rushing off to? PlayStation, movies, Internet? Jean Zimmerman also says:

Dispatching the pleasures of cooking good food in order to slay dragons on EverQuest.com seems not that rewarding a trade-off. . . .

. . . We buy an illusion of taste, an illusion of satisfaction, an illusion of comfort, an illusion of nutrition and health.

. . . We’ve trained our taste buds to savor fat and salt and chemical additives, synthetic flavors.¹⁴

Besides good food, family meals have numerous beneficial effects. Evidence suggests that family meals with parents present contribute to better nutritive intake,¹⁵ fewer psychological problems, and less risky or self-destructive behaviors.¹⁶ Family meals in a positive environment also play an important role in preventing unhealthy weight-control

practices.¹⁷ One researcher suggests that it appears to be more promising to establish rituals of meal preparation and eating than to provide cognitive knowledge of nutrition.¹⁸

Besides the physical benefits of family meals, the simple domestic act of creating a meal and enjoying it together is an important connector. But, as described in her book *Made from Scratch*, Jean Zimmerman was asked whether we could “bond equally well over a juicy Whopper as with a home-cooked meal.” She answered, “The rewards of the experience are not the same.”¹⁹

The Stapp family in Alpine makes mealtime a daily event. Everyone participates, and “What’s for dinner?” is an exciting part of the day. Dinner is always homemade, not purchased from a store. It doesn’t have to be elaborate to create a time to connect and get a feeling for each person’s day. Outside distractions can be managed so that the emphasis is on passing food, talking, and interacting. Children learn to share family food instead of asking for individualized orders as they do in a restaurant. At home the regular mealtime experience gives children a sense of security because they know what to expect at the end of each day. Indeed, sociologist Robert Bellah has called the family meal the “family sacrament.”²⁰ These simple everyday routines have great power in our lives. They are the deep ditches and ridges of earth that help prevent outside forces from overwhelming and distracting us from our eternal goals.

I challenge you to plan a regular mealtime in your current home and prepare meals in partnership with people you enjoy. Retain positive examples from your past and change what needs to be changed. See what happens when you regard an everyday event like mealtime as sacred. Lend a hand, increase your knowledge and skills, and see if relationships and your sense of well-being improve.

Second, Moroni put up strong timbers and tall pickets on top of the ridges of dirt. As you

develop spiritual strength through everyday activities in your home, you are building strong timbers and pickets to protect your homes. In the Doctrine and Covenants we read that God has only given us spiritual commandments and that none of them are temporal (see D&C 29:35). *Temporal* means lasting for time only. If God’s commandments are not temporal, that means they are not limited to this life: His commandments are everlasting. We can apply this to our homes by realizing that all our actions on earth have consequences. The things we do on earth shape the person we become now and in the life to come. Thus the earthly patterns of living we create in our homes have power to influence our spiritual outcomes. Spouses can “love and care for each other and for their children”²¹ and foster development of characteristics to prepare them for eternity.

We learn lessons of life at home that build strong character. Family researcher Enola Aird²² reminds us that at home we learn how to work and how to govern ourselves; we learn manners and morals; we learn how to become self-reliant—or not. “Without parents’ humanizing work, children may be quite smart, well-educated, and successful but so selfish, self-centered, and uncaring as to be essentially uncivilized—not able to live in a spirit of community with others.”²³ If we realize the value of everyday life, we can see that even the smallest child can feel like a valued individual through something as mundane as folding laundry. Little children can match socks, sort colors, fold towels, and be recognized for their accomplishments. Over the years as the tasks’ complexity increases, the children gain confidence in their ability to choose and do worthwhile things.

The integrative nature of everyday living provides opportunities to gain strength in many ways—physically, intellectually, socially, and spiritually. Clothing is an example: We all cover and protect our physical bodies from the elements. We develop intellectually as we learn

to budget and care for our clothing. We grow socially as we choose clothing that represents who we are and gain a sense of being and belonging. And we develop spiritual strength as we choose clothing that shows respect for our bodies and creates a personal environment that is conducive to the Spirit.

It is easy to take clothing for granted because, as one scholar put it, it is our “second skin,”²⁴ but prophets have consistently reminded us about the connection between appearance, behavior, and eternal outcomes. They advise us to create our own style that can keep us “on the pathway to immortality and eternal life.”²⁵ In the *For the Strength of Youth* booklet we are reminded that the way we dress is a reflection of what we are on the inside and our dress can show that we are disciples of Christ. Thus our everyday responsibilities are not vague—they are tangible, daily activities with form and meaning that have power to strengthen us. Begin today to recognize opportunities to grow spiritually through everyday choices. Build strong timbers and high pickets to guard your home against the adversary.

Finally, like Moroni, on top of your timbers and pickets, build towers and places of security to guard your homes. Draw closer to Christ and let His light increase in your daily life as a watchtower to safeguard your home and family. Elder Theodore M. Burton referred to the opportunity to receive light and truth by the temporal and spiritual nature of God’s commandments. He used the examples of tithing and the Word of Wisdom and said that while it is true that obedience to these commandments may lead to temporal blessings, there are also spiritual blessings that come. One of these is the opportunity to “bring us back into the warmth and light of God.”²⁶ There is a link between receiving light and truth, learning obedience, and our homes. In our homes, family duties are opportunities to practice gaining light and truth through obedience.

Jesus Christ is the Light of the World. When we walk in His light, we follow Him and keep His commandments. The closer we follow, the more light we have. The brother of Jared provided an example of walking in the light as he prepared barges “tight like unto a dish” (Ether 2:17). He was concerned that the barges would have neither light nor air. The Lord instructed him to make a hole in each barge for the air but gave no instruction about the light. The Lord explained that windows would be dashed to pieces and fire wouldn’t work. Then He asked, “Therefore what will ye that I should prepare for you that ye may have light when ye are swallowed up in the depths of the sea?” (v. 25). This is when the brother of Jared “did molten out of a rock sixteen small stones” (Ether 3:1), then asked the Lord to touch the stones “and prepare them that they may shine forth in darkness” (v. 4). Literally and figuratively, the brother of Jared and his people drew upon the Light of Christ for their journey across the sea.

As we journey to our “promised land” in our “boats”—or our homes—we can practice obedience ourselves and we can teach our children at home by paying attention to our family duties. For example, by learning to do chores regularly, spouses and children can learn obedience and exactness in small things that have less severe consequences; then we are prepared to keep commandments and make sacred covenants.

To illustrate, one of our daughters told me a story about going to a school dance. She waited until I was distracted with company, then, when I wasn’t looking, she changed and hurried off in a skirt she knew I wouldn’t like. At one point during the evening boys started paying attention to her, and she remembers vividly how it made her feel. It wasn’t the kind of attention she wanted after all. At that moment she decided to get rid of that outfit. Her experience and the consequences with clothing helped her learn an important lesson about

agency and obedience, and she was able to invite more of the Light of Christ into her life.

The Lord has always commanded His people to attend to their family duties at home. In Deuteronomy 11:19 we read:

And ye shall teach [the commandments to] your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

Tomorrow we celebrate 175 years since The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized in this dispensation. When the Church was organized, the counsel to “attend to all family duties” was among the important foundational instructions given in section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants. The Lord described the duties of a priest and said that one is to “visit the house of each member, and exhort them to . . . attend to all family duties” (D&C 20:47). This instruction is repeated twice (see v. 51). Three years later, in section 93, the leading brethren of the Church were chastened for neglecting their family duties (see D&C 93:41–53). Today, in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” we are reminded again of our sacred family duties.

We often think about family duties in terms of family home evening, prayer, and scripture reading, but we should also remember daily activities of the home like feeding or clothing ourselves and recognize their power to help us practice obedience, service, love, and cooperation. Can we draw closer to the Lord through the clothing we choose, the meals we prepare, and our recreational choices? How much light do we want? Have you stopped to think about all the other small, ordinary things you do every day in this way? In Doctrine and Covenants 50:24 the Lord promised, “He that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light.” We also read, “For he will give unto the faithful line upon line,

precept upon precept; and I will try you and prove you herewith” (D&C 98:12).

Prove faithful in the little things and the bigger things will be added on. Opportunities to learn and practice in the home are sacred; they are times to grow spiritually and draw closer to the Savior. This process of growth is a lifelong quest, and our home environment gives us repeated, sustained chances to practice becoming godlike individuals and families throughout the different seasons of our lives.

Conclusion

With your deep ditches, ridges, timbers, pickets, and towers in place, stand guard at the entrance and be deliberate about protecting daily activities. Noted family scholar William Doherty coined the phrase “intentional family.”²⁷ We can extend this idea to an “intentional home.” The opposite of the intentional home is the “entropic home.” Entropy is the tendency of a physical system to lose energy and coherence over time. Think about your daily life. What happens when you don’t plan and prepare? It quickly descends into chaos. Will you drift and experience entropy or will you steer as you establish intentional daily life? Whether you drift or steer, you *will* create daily life in your home. I challenge you today—whether you live in a house, an apartment, or a dorm—to do all in your power to protect your home from moral tarantulas and snakes that want to rob you of the sacred time, space, and activities within your home.

If you feel burdened or unsure about your responsibilities at home, the Lord can bless you to know what to do. At one particularly stressful time in my life, I felt like the daily load was more than I could bear. One night I had a dream—I saw myself placing a large bundle at the feet of each of my children. When I woke the next morning, I realized my children were responsible for their agency, not me, and that it was good for them to share in the work of our home. But I still had a very large bundle and

wondered how I could manage it. Amazingly, the next night I had another dream, and this time I saw myself placing my bundle at the feet of the Savior. How I love Him. I'm thankful for the opportunities I've had over the years to draw closer to the Savior as a result of working, learning, and growing in my home.

In conclusion, we can learn one more lesson from the Book of Mormon. In the midst of these fierce battles, preparations for wars, and unrelenting attacks, Mormon wrote, "But behold there never was a happier time among the people of Nephi, since the days of Nephi, than in the days of Moroni" (Alma 50:23). We too can be the happiest people, even in the midst of difficult times, when we ask the Lord to bless us in protecting our homes and renewing our powers.

I express my love to you great young people and bear you my fervent testimony of the important work you will do in your homes. I know that our homes are important to Heavenly Father. He chose a humble home for the organization of the Church on April 6, 1830. He invites us to His house to begin a new family unit with marriage. I know that He will pour out His blessings upon you and help you as you create and protect your homes. I pray for your success and happiness in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Map* (Provo: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2000).
2. In Sophy Valentine, *Biography of Ann Howell Burt* (Brigham City, Utah: n.p., 1916), 24; quoted in Andrew H. Hedges, "Battle of the Homefront: The Early Pioneer Art of Homemaking," in *Nearly Everything Imaginable: The Everyday Life of Utah's Mormon Pioneers*, ed. Ronald W. Walker and Doris R. Dant (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1999), 121.
3. Valentine, *Biography*, 24, 25; see also Hedges, "Battle," 121.
4. Cheryl Mendelson, *Home Comforts: The Art and Science of Keeping House* (New York: Scribner, 1999), 7, 8.
5. L. Tom Perry, "The Importance of the Family," *Ensign*, May 2003, 40.
6. See Mary Pipher, *The Shelter of Each Other: Rebuilding Our Families* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), 12.
7. Spencer W. Kimball, "Families Can Be Eternal," *Ensign*, November 1980, 4.
8. See Joseph B. Verrengia, "Checking Up on Families," *Provo Daily Herald*, 20 March 2005, A1, A6.
9. From Sarah Allen, "The Meaning of Home," in *Creating Home as a Sacred Center: Principles for Everyday Living*, ed. Shirley R. Klein and E. Jeffrey Hill (Provo: BYU Academic Publishing, in press).
10. Bible Dictionary, s.v. "temple," 781.
11. *The World Book Dictionary*, 1984, s.v. "sacred."
12. From Tom Van Aman, reported by Jean Zimmerman in *Made from Scratch: Reclaiming the Pleasures of the American Hearth* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 157.
13. Zimmerman, *Made from Scratch*, 173.
14. Zimmerman, *Made from Scratch*, 158, 161.
15. See Tami M. Videon and Carolyn K. Manning, "Influences on Adolescent Eating Patterns: The Importance of Family Meals," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 32, no. 5 (May 2003): 365–73.
16. See Marla E. Eisenberg, Rachel E. Olson, Dianne Neumark-Sztainer, Mary Story, and Linda H. Bearinger, "Correlations Between Family Meals and Psychosocial Well-Being Among Adolescents," *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* 158 (August 2004): 792–96.
17. See Dianne Neumark-Sztainer, Melanie Wall, Mary Story, and Jayne A. Fulkerson, "Are Family Meal Patterns Associated with Disordered Eating Behaviors Among Adolescents?" *Journal of Adolescent Health* 35, no. 5 (November 2004): 350–59.

18. See Joachim Westenhoefer, "Establishing Dietary Habits During Childhood for Long-Term Weight Control," *Annals of Nutrition and Metabolism* 46, no. 1 (2002): 18–23.
19. Zimmerman, *Made from Scratch*, 240.
20. Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *The Good Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 260.
21. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, November 1995, 102.
22. See Enola G. Aird, "On Rekindling a Spirit of 'Home Training': A Mother's Notes from the Front," in *Taking Parenting Public: The Case for a New Social Movement*, ed. Sylvia A. Hewlett, Nancy Rankin, and Cornel West (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002), 13–28.
23. Aird, "Rekindling," 19.
24. Marilyn J. Horn, *The Second Skin: An Interdisciplinary Study of Clothing* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968).
25. Spencer W. Kimball, "On My Honor," in *Speeches of the Year, 1978* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1979), 132; see also "First Presidency Message: On My Honor," *Ensign*, April 1979, 3.
26. Theodore M. Burton, "Light and Truth," *Ensign*, May 1981, 30.
27. William J. Doherty, *The Intentional Family: How to Build Family Ties in Our Modern World* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1997).