

# Her Calling—Her Blessing

DONNA SMITH PACKER

**D**o you know who you are, little child of mine,  
So precious and dear to me?  
Do you know you're a part of a great design  
That is vast as eternity?  
Can you think for a moment how much depends  
On your holding the "Iron Rod"?  
Your life is forever—worlds without end—  
Do you know you're a child of God?

Do you know where you've been, little child of  
mine?  
It is hard to recall, I know;  
Do you ever remember that Home Divine—  
With the [Parents who loved] you so?  
(*"To a Child,"* by Ora Pate Stewart, [Provo, UT:  
Fernwood, 1964])

These lyrics from the song *"To a Child,"* by Ora Pate Stewart, always bring the Lord's Spirit to me.

My husband and I had been married for nine years when we heard these words from the doctor: "You are not going to keep this one."

As parents we looked at the wee baby who so recently had left his heavenly home. We did the only thing we could do. He was named and

given a father's blessing. We prayed, had faith, and said aloud, "Thy will be done." Hours passed, and then days, in our very small community hospital. Doctors and nurses continued to work with our son. At last, we heard the words from the doctor, "I believe you will keep this one." During this experience, we as parents grew in understanding and strength and drew closer to the Lord.

In a much larger hospital thirteen years later, this exact experience was repeated with our tenth child. He was named and given a father's blessing. We prayed, had faith, and once again said aloud, "Thy will be done." Hours crept slowly by. Once again we were greatly blessed. He would live. The lessons learned years before had been repeated. Soon President Packer, then an Assistant to the Twelve, was able to catch a flight for a delayed assignment in Europe.

This second time our children were older. We reinforced our teaching of the Father's

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plan, the Atonement, and the Godhead. In teaching our children we also learned the basic principles of the gospel ourselves. Teaching and growth never end with children or parents.

Sometimes I get a telephone call from one of our children. They need help or they express concern about an overwhelming new church calling. Other times they just call to report in. The boys “call home” to their father to get advice on practical and spiritual matters. “Calling home” is an important part of our family. “Calling home” through prayer to our Heavenly Father is a necessity. We need His help and comfort and blessing.

Sister Freda Johanna Jensen Lee, wife of President Harold B. Lee, would say, “My first good morning is to the Lord, and my last good-night is to the Lord.” I know she was right.

We can’t go too far astray if we, on bended knee, place a call to our Heavenly Father’s home twice a day. We will receive the expected help, assurance, and peace of mind.

Some years ago two of our little boys were wrestling on the rug before the fireplace. They had reached the pitch where laughter turns to tears and play becomes a struggle. My husband worked his foot gently between them and lifted the older, four-year-old boy to a sitting position on the rug, saying, “Hey there, you monkey! You had better settle down.”

The little child folded his arms and looked at his father with surprising seriousness. His little-boy feelings were hurt, and he protested, “I not a monkey, Daddy—I a person.” And indeed he was a person, a child of God loaned to us for a short time, and then he would be on his own. (See Boyd K. Packer, *The Shield of Faith* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1998], 27.)

“The Family: A Proclamation to the World” is akin to scripture. Today I will read only two paragraphs:

*All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such,*

*each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.*

*In the premortal realm, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshiped God as their Eternal Father and accepted His plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize his or her divine destiny as an heir of eternal life. The divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally. [“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, November 1995, 102]*

In an address at a general Relief Society conference, President J. Reuben Clark Jr. said:

*Eve came to build, to organize, through the power of the Father, the bodies of mortal men, . . . so that God’s design and the Great Plan might meet fruition.*

*This was her calling; this was her blessing, bestowed by the Priesthood. This is the place of our wives and of our mothers in the Eternal Plan. . . .*

*. . . Mother guides, incites, entreats, instructs, directs . . . the soul for which she built the earthly home, in its march onward to exaltation. God gives the soul its destiny, but mother leads it along the way. [“Our Wives and Our Mothers in the Eternal Plan,” *The Relief Society Magazine*, vol. 33 no. 12 (December 1946), 800–01, 803]*

The vision of what is expected in earth life can be obtained through scripture study, words of the prophets, pondering “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.” With the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, we can understand these things. We can understand the past, focus on the present, and see into the future. Work and service are requirements throughout our lifetime.

The gospel of Jesus Christ gives answers to questions that all mankind ponders. These concepts are taught nowhere else in the world. President Packer has said:

*There are so many unanswered questions. Why the inequities in life?*

*Some are so rich.*

*Some so wretchedly poor.*

*Some so beautifully formed, and others with pitiful handicaps.*

*Some are gifted and others retarded.*

*Why the injustice, the untimely death? Why the neglect, the sorrow, the pain? . . .*

*The doctrine is simply this: life did not begin with mortal birth. We lived in spirit form before we entered mortality. We are spiritually the children of God. . . .*

*The scriptures teach this doctrine, the doctrine of premortal life. For His own reasons, the Lord provides answers to some questions [scattered throughout] the scriptures. We are to find them; [but] we are to earn them. In that way sacred things are hidden from the insincere. . . .*

*. . . When one knows the doctrine, parenthood becomes a sacred obligation, the begetting of life a sacred privilege. [Boyd K. Packer, "The Mystery of Life," *Ensign*, November 1983, 16–18; emphasis in original]*

I have a personal witness that what he said is true. Having a testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ gives us confidence and courage in life. We can yield our agency to the Lord and let him manage our lives. I know it requires faith to do this, but our divine nature gives us that strength, and we find joy in our commitment and our duty.

Sometimes, because of another person's agency, we cannot follow through on all our mortal commitments. The Lord loves us, understands us, and will bless us for our desires and efforts.

Our present-day servants of the Lord have made it very plain that marriage and children

will not eternally be denied righteous women. The Lord is a just God.

I became acquainted with the book *Gospel Doctrine* by Joseph F. Smith in my early married years. The chapters on priesthood and home and family have been most helpful to me. One section is called "The Truest Greatness." This prophet states:

*To do well those things which God ordained to be the common lot of all man-kind, is the truest greatness. To be a successful father or a successful mother is greater than to be a successful general or a successful statesman. . . .*

*We should never be discouraged in those daily tasks which God has ordained to the common lot of man. . . .*

*Let us not be trying to substitute an artificial life for the true one. [GD, 385]*

When our ten children were at home, I sometimes would wonder if our teachings were being transferred to them. One day I noticed a drawing by one of the children. It was of the young boy Joseph Smith and the First Vision. Joseph had been drawn looking up at two Heavenly Beings. I saw individual fingers and toes on the Heavenly Visitors. At that moment it was confirmed in my heart that our gospel teachings were being received by our children.

Another time I had a great learning experience. It was a very busy day when all of our ten children were living at home. Somehow my day had gotten away from me. The dinner hour was near, and I recalled some sound advice my mother had given me: "You plan ahead, and you get your simple nutritious meals going early in the day. You know the children will be hungry before the dinner hour. Use some common sense. Sometimes you may have to feed them early." This advice had been overlooked that day.

I hastily moved into action. The assigned children on meal preparation came to my aid,

and soon dinner was underway. I heard the hum of a busy household and then an unusual sound in another room. I found two of the younger children having a difference of opinion. I suggested that each could sit on a chair and think things over. The younger one looked at me in defiance and said, “You not in charge of me!” I was a bit taken aback, but I just quietly drew him aside and calmly explained that Heavenly Father had temporarily assigned me to love and to care for him. It took only a few more sentences, and he climbed up on the chair to think.

Soon the dinner bell rang, and we all sat up to the table. I learned the value of prompt meals. I had been part of the problem that day. Yes, the crisis was over but the learning was not. As I recall, our next family home evening lesson was on obedience.

As parents we worked together in our home. The children soon learned that we were united. The answers from father and mother were always the same. We taught the children that there would come a time when they would leave home. It was time for more schooling, a mission, and marriage. Even with the world going downhill, we had confidence they could face troubled times. We wanted them to have the fulness of life. We would always be available, but we were willing to let them go with our love, faith, and blessings. Even though we as parents knew the adversary had great power in the world, we also knew that worthy sons and daughters of God have power over Satan. Our children had the divine nature, and they could succeed on their own.

My Grandmother Jordan was a great example of one who knew her divine nature. In 1909 as a recent convert to the Church, she had to make difficult decisions and took firm action, unlike her typically quiet, timid self. She told me she received prayerful direction, and she was empowered with vision and strength beyond her own. Because she did what had to be done, I had the blessing

of being born in the covenant and having a rich heritage. I have many ancestors who have faced life with courage. Their actions have given me great advantages and responsibilities.

For the past forty-three years my husband has been away most weekends on Church service. This has been a productive family-history time. Becoming acquainted with previous generations has given me great joy and happiness. Our family has enjoyed researching, writing, and illustrating life stories and having the temple experiences together. Knowing our ancestors and serving them has brought a richness into our lives. Our ancestors are vitally interested in our successes here on earth. I know on many occasions I have received help from the other side.

I am in harmony with the thoughts of Elder Melvin J. Ballard:

*I believe . . . that the hearts not only of the children are turned to their fathers, but the hearts of the fathers in the Spirit World are turned to their children on earth. . . .*

*. . . There are evidences that the dead are interested. If you will go forward with the research work the way will be opened on the right and on the left. You will be astonished to find avenues open. . . .*

*When you have done all you can do and have reached the limit, what will happen? . . . Then will come God’s opportunity. [“The Joy of Sacred Service,” in *Saviors on Mount Zion*, comp. Archibald F. Bennett (Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union Board, 1950), 200–202; emphasis in original]*

Cleo, an auntie of mine, was in a nursing home. After traveling some distance, we made a final visit. Cleo and her husband, Cliff, were content and at peace. At one point during our visit, Cleo spoke forcefully: “I can’t just lay around here. I must get on with life.” She did not mean this earthly life. The Lord granted her desire. I am certain she was welcomed by loving earthly parents and a multitude of family

members for whom she had been instrumental in finding their names and seeing to their temple work.

Because of the divine nature of women, we seem to be very sensitive to the whisperings of the Holy Ghost. In the home mothers need to act as the receiving station for the communications from a loving Father in Heaven. It is vital that you remain worthy and alert. You must avoid getting too stressed or busy for the quiet promptings of the Spirit.

While raising our seven sons and three daughters, I had a few down days. The budget was very tight, physical demands were high, and I felt the expectations of others were even higher. Even though I recognized my divine nature, knew about the plan of happiness, and knew my husband was a worthy priesthood holder, I still had a few discouraging days as we raised our large family.

I learned that if I felt physically well I was more optimistic and better able to cope with life. I studied and practiced the Lord's law of health. I was responsible to give my children a healthy start in life. Sleep was an essential, so we retired early. We combined this with regular attendance at church meetings. Renewing our covenants with the Lord and the association with people with similar goals helped us to stay on course. Temple attendance helped me to clarify my vision and gave me a deep feeling of gratitude for all my blessings and my opportunities for growth.

There was consistent help from our extended family—a box of outgrown clothing, a basket of fruit, an hour of babysitting at just the right time. The Relief Society gave thrifty and practical homemaking ideas. I always felt their love and support.

Music had the power to comfort, edify, and bring joy into my everyday living.

Posting uplifting statements around the home as gentle reminders of what life is all about has helped me. I'll give you a few of my favorite statements: President David O. McKay

liked to say, "Whate'er thou art, act well thy part" (*Cherished Experiences from the Writings of President David O. McKay*, comp. Clare Middlemiss [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1955], 174). I once heard Sister McKay say, "It is the artful duty for the woman to adjust." I enjoy the scripture "Be thou humble; and the Lord thy God shall lead thee by the hand, and give thee answer to thy prayers" (D&C 112:10). The Prophet Joseph Smith said, "There must be decision of character aside from sympathy" (*HC*, 4:570).

A 1950s *Children's Friend* magazine had a poem that I posted inside a kitchen cupboard door. The paper was yellow with age before our children were raised. On difficult days this poem quickly brought back my focus:

*Plastic little [children]  
Made from heaven's clay.  
Oh, Father, give us vision,  
To mould them right today.*

*Potential gods in miniature;  
We must have help from Thee;  
For how they're fashioned here today,  
Will endure through eternity.*  
(Lucy G. Bloomfield, "Primary Teacher's Prayer," *Children's Friend*, February 1954, 74)

There are rewards for completion of commitments and promises to the Lord. President J. Reuben Clark Jr. told the Relief Society sisters:

*The Priesthood will wish to proclaim their debt to these their helpmeets without whom the Priesthood could not have worked out their destiny. . . .  
. . . Your offspring, saved and exalted in the presence of God, will never forget you, will ever bless you, and will sing hymns of eternal gratitude for the bodies you gave them and taught them to make the Temples of the Spirit of God. ["Our Wives and Our Mothers in the Eternal Plan," *The**

*Relief Society Magazine*, vol. 33 no. 12 (December 1946), 804]

My husband and I have seen some rewards of our teaching as we have watched our children, grandchildren, and, now, great-grandchildren. Children are always desired and welcomed in our family. Sometimes faith is tested, but we have found if we keep our covenants, the Lord will bless us. Our grandchildren's world is more challenging than our world was, but their parents are doing a much better job than we did.

We are grateful other families teach their children the basic principles of the gospel, obedience to all commandments, and of their divine nature. They have raised special children, allowing our children and grandchildren to be married in the temple to a worthy partner. We have the assurance that the younger generation is equally yoked, having the same desires and eternal goals. They "shall stand in

holy places, and shall not be moved" (D&C 45:32).

In the year 2002 we celebrated our 55th wedding anniversary with our family of nearly 100. We pondered a theme for the evening, "A Legacy of Covenant Choices." This was spelled out in framed needlework and is an important part of our home:

Faith in daily living and in the future.  
Courage in times of trial.  
Power in family unity.  
Service to God and Mankind.  
Vision of eternities together.  
"We are covenant keepers."

"Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation. Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation" (Isaiah 12:2–3). In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.