

“Honor Thy Father and Thy Mother”

REX D. PINEGAR

It is a great privilege to be with you today. I take delight in sharing this opportunity with you students and missionaries; it’s a great honor to be in your presence.

Introductions are always interesting and sometimes a concern for me. Several years ago, while serving as a member of the Sunday School General Board, I attended a stake conference where I received an introduction that I shall not soon forget.

When I arrived at the airport, a counselor in the stake presidency was there to meet me, and he greeted me with the words: “I’m surely happy you’ve arrived. I’ve been anxious to see what you looked like.” He smiled a curious smile, I smiled one in return, and we left for the stake center.

Several times during the two days of conference, the stake presidency exchanged knowing looks. During the follow-up meeting with Elder Thomas S. Monson and the stake presidency, the counselor who had met me at the airport handed a letter to Elder Monson with the comment, “Perhaps you’d like to know how they’ve introduced the member of the general board who attended our conference.” Elder Monson then read: “This is to introduce Brother Rex D. Pinegar, currently an assistant professor of special education at Brigham Young University, and formerly a mentally retarded teacher.”

About all I could respond with was, “At least it said ‘formerly.’”

Elder Monson has had a lot of fun with that introduction many times since. He later sent me that written introduction with a memo saying, “Thought you would like to have my copy of the most interesting biographical outline a Sunday School General Board member I have yet read.”

(Perhaps I should explain that my career as a teacher had included several years of teaching students with various types of mental retardation.)

Knowing who you are at Church headquarters is sometimes a challenge also. Each of us seems to have our own double. Elder Neal A. Maxwell had given one of his brilliant, stimulating talks at a session of general conference. As I stepped up to meet my wife following the session, a woman came rushing to me and congratulated me on my excellent message. I hesitated in responding, as I had not spoken in that session. Seeing my embarrassment she said,

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“Oh, I’m sorry Elder Rector, I thought you were Elder Maxwell.” You just have to keep track of who you really are.

There is no group of people I love or admire more than the young adults of the Church, perhaps because I have four of my own numbered among you. I see exemplified in them and in you great strengths of character and purpose. Because of your strength, I have confidence in our future.

In my assignment I have many opportunities to associate with the splendid young men and women of the Church. My experiences with the Missionary Department and now with the Young Men of the Church provide me with daily examples of faith and courage and strength of character.

Recently I have had some experiences with young men and women that I believe exemplify this strength in youth and young adults of the Church and that lead me to the thoughts and message I would like to share with you today.

While in Canada recently, I was happy to meet a young man serving as a missionary whom I had interviewed some years before. He had wanted so much to serve a mission, but his parents were against his doing so. He felt torn, knowing the prophet’s counsel that every worthy young man should serve a mission, yet also knowing the Lord’s commandment, “Honor thy father and thy mother.” He wanted to do what was right, and he wanted me to tell him what to do. I counseled him to go home and live worthily for a mission call and to honor his parents by abiding by their wishes. And that is what he did. I didn’t hear any more from this young man until I saw him on my visit to Canada. Now he was a missionary, serving with his parents’ approval and support. “Elder Pinegar is a prophet,” he said to the stake president. “He promised me my parents would some day consent to my coming on a mission if I would honor and obey them, and he was right.” Now I want to be quick to assure you

that I make no claim of being a prophet; but I can promise you, as the prophets have promised, that the Lord’s words are true. His commandments are for our good. His promises are sure to those who love him and keep his commandments.

It is interesting to me that the Lord found it necessary to command us to honor our parents. Why must we be commanded to honor those whom we love? Why do we sometimes become thoughtless and thankless toward our parents who seldom, if ever, stop caring for us, their children?

One morning some time ago, my wife received a telephone call from a friend in a distant state, a person she had not seen for ten or eleven years. After visiting and renewing their acquaintance for a few moments, this friend said she had called to ask a special favor. She related that she had spent the night in prayer, seeking help in reaching her somewhat rebellious son. As morning approached, my wife’s name came to her mind, and this had prompted her telephone call. She asked my wife for the names of persons who could perhaps reach out to her son and touch his life in a positive way. She expressed her love and confidence in her son and said, “I know someday he can be reached, and I don’t intend to give up. If I have to stay on my knees throughout eternity, I’ll do it, but I will never give up!”

Good parents feel concern for their children, regardless of age. A great responsibility comes with being a parent. Until that privilege and responsibility comes to you, I believe you cannot fully comprehend the love and concern parents feel for their children. Until you have held your newborn child and realized that the spirit of life within has just come from the presence of God himself; until you have observed its body as a miniature adult in a state of perfection and purity and have promised yourself and the Lord that you will do everything in your power to return this blessed being to its Maker as pure and powerful as it was when

God sent it to your care; until you have, as a parents, experienced this wonderful, awesome, humbling, and joyful occasion, you cannot understand the extent of your parents' love for you or of a parent's determination to "never give up." A parent's love never ceases. Remember Alma? How he prayed and pleaded for the return of his son from a life of sin to one of righteousness!

Some time ago, I was assigned to attend a stake conference in a certain city where a new stake president was called. On Sunday morning this fine, outstanding man, a vice-president of a leading national company, approached the pulpit in a spirit of deep humility. He began his remarks by talking about his father. He had telephoned his father, who lived in a distant city, and asked that he pray for him in his new assignment and calling. His father's answer was, "Son, I've been praying for you all of your life."

If we are to be able to live the commandment, "Honor thy father and thy mother," we must recognize the love our parents have for us. We must have faith in our parents. We must understand that their love and concern for us is usually basic to the hopes and desires they have for us and we have for ourselves. They usually know best. They have been down the path of life. They are not perfect. They may make mistakes in judgment, and they may lack wisdom; however, we will not go wrong by respecting them and heeding their righteous counsel.

At a stake conference in Idaho, we were talking about the importance of journals. A man had spoken on how important and what a blessing his journal had been to him. Then his fourteen-year-old son responded to what his father's journal meant to him. He said, "As I have read my father's journal, I've discovered that he has had many of the same problems that I have, and he has come out of them all right. It would be my prayer that we all write our journals so that we can turn out to be as

good as my dad is." What a great tribute to that man who was an example for his son. This boy had gained from this experience a new love and respect for his father.

Sometimes the real test of the love of a parent comes in denying us a pleasure of the moment so that we may have, instead, the happiness of eternity. Or a parent may have to stand by and let us struggle with life in order for us to grow in strength and in wisdom.

One of the favorite stories of our family comes from a true incident in the life of a woman who was the victim of cerebral palsy. The woman tells how as a child she would look forward to meeting her father at the gate of the ranch corral each evening as he returned from rounding up the cattle. He would drive the herd into the corral, close the big gate, and then hoist her up into his arms and steady her hand as she practiced placing the rope over the post to secure the gate. One evening she waited in her usual place by the gate. She watched as the cattle ran into the corral. Then she looked for her father, but he did not come. Panic struck her as she realized the gate must be closed and secured without his steadying hand to guide her own. It was with great effort and struggle that she tried over and over again to slide the rope up and over the gate post. With great concentration and with her strength almost completely exhausted, she finally succeeded. As she completed what was for her a very difficult task, she looked up to see her father nearby. He had been there for some time watching her determined struggle, wanting to reach out and help her and to steady and guide her hands as he usually did; but he knew she needed that experience. She needed to know she could do the task and thus gain the confidence to try other difficult tasks on her own. As much as he loved her and wanted to make her trial easier, he had to permit her to struggle, to learn through her own efforts the satisfaction that comes from personal sacrifice and achievement.

As you face your own struggles and challenges, you will most often find that your greatest support and understanding will come from your parents.

As a young high school boy, I was wrestling in a state tournament, and I was in my usual position—on the bottom. When I looked up from the mat, I spotted a familiar face among the fans in the bleachers. It wasn't a pleasant face. In fact, it was one filled with pain. It was one of a father who was seeing his son on the bottom and who was working with all his energy (at that distance) to get his son on top. Having seen that look on his face, I knew there was only one thing I could do and that was to change my position. From somewhere came the strength I needed. I am quite certain that the young man I was wrestling was as surprised as I was when he found that I was on the top and that he had suddenly lost the match. Immediately the look on the face of my father changed; and a smile, a sense of accomplishment, and a sense of satisfaction were there instead. The encouragement from that parent, and the desire of a son to please his father, had reached to the son and given him strength to change his situation for the better.

Let us consider the strength that comes from parental support as we look at the life of the boy Joseph Smith. Consider his experience with the Lord, the miraculous experience of having seen the Father and the Son. Following this experience was the visit of the Angel Moroni. Who was the first person Joseph was told to tell about his experience? Not his best friend, not even his girlfriend, not his teacher, not his minister. He was told to go and tell his father (see Joseph Smith—History 1:49). His father's words were, "This is of the Lord. You do what he has told you to do." The Lord taught Joseph to first turn to his parents; and having done so, Joseph received the support of his family.

We also should turn to our parents, counsel with them, and share with them our ideas, our

goals, our plans, and even our problems. We should obey them. Obedience is the greatest measure of our faith in our parents and of our desire to keep the commandments to honor them.

While I was serving as mission president in Virginia, two of our missionaries met and taught a young man at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute in Blacksburg. As they progressed through the discussions, the young man gained a vision of the truth. He received a testimony. He desired to be baptized, but his parents would not permit him to do so. He was very discouraged. He came and sought my counsel. I told him to heed the feelings of his parents, to honor them, and that the time would come when they would allow him to join the Church.

Several months later I was seated on the stand at stake conference prior to the beginning of the Saturday evening session. Up the aisle came this young man—bright, shining, his face just beaming. As he approached me he said, "President, you'll never guess what has happened."

I knew in my heart what the result was, but I said, "Mike, tell me."

His response was, "You'll never believe it. Not only have my parents permitted me to be baptized tonight, but they are taking the lessons! They are grateful for a Church that teaches its youth to honor their parents. Thanks so much for encouraging me to honor them."

This kind of experience has been repeated many times for me as I have met with the youth of the Church. There was a girl from Charlottesville, Virginia; a young lady from England; a young man from Toronto, Canada. I have many letters from young people who have kept the commandment to honor their parents and have thereby received the blessings of support and strength of their families as they have joined the Church.

A young woman with whom I am acquainted was planning to be married. Sound

familiar? Her parents were overjoyed. "At last," they said. She was twenty-six years old. She had been very choosy. The whole family rejoiced when she found someone she could agree to marry. The date was set; the invitations were printed; the wedding dress was selected; and the trousseau was ready. Then one evening this young woman sought out her parents. She was very sorry to disappoint them, but she just couldn't go through with it. She could not marry this man.

Her parents were shocked. "Why?" they asked. "You have so much in common. You enjoy being together. You are perfect for each other. You're in love. And you're twenty-six years old!" Then she explained her feelings to her parents. This man did not honor his mother. The girl had been bothered for a long time by the way he spoke to his mother, by the disrespect he showed her, by his discourtesy. She could not marry this man because some day he might treat her the same way.

Contrast that with the family where the mother's mother, a young woman not quite sixty years of age, is suddenly stricken with cancer, her life ebbing away—a most difficult situation—and yet the family determined that they would sacrifice their lives to care for her, to meet her every need, to look after that which would make her comfortable during her remaining days. Or consider the young widow who had planned to go to Europe to pick up her son who had just completed his mission. All her children were in Europe. This would be a great occasion. She could visit them all, but she followed the counsel of her father-in-law who said, "I don't feel good about your going." She remained at home.

We honor our parents most through living a personally righteous life. I realize that some of you may be without parents. Most of you are away from your own parents now. But someone has said that the success of children is the success of their parents. As a parent I can tell you there is no greater honor that can come to

me or any parent than to see my children successfully living the teachings of the gospel. Financial success, educational attainments, honors of men—these marks of your success in life are sources of pride to any father and mother. But the real joy and honor comes to them through your faithfulness to the Lord's commandments. In this way we honor not only our parents, but also our Heavenly Father.

A young man shared with me an experience he had the first day he arrived on this campus, an experience that taught him a valuable lesson. He had left his home and parents and traveled all the way across the United States to attend Brigham Young University when he was just seventeen years old. He left with a feeling of excitement for this opportunity to be on his own. He looked forward to this new independence and "freedom." He was rather happy to be away from the close supervision of his parents. This thought enticed him, for he could now do, or not do, anything he wished.

As he went into the administration building to get his identification card, one of the first persons he met said to him, "Aren't you the son of—?" and she mentioned his mother's name. "I've known your mother for many years."

As she expressed her respect and special regard for his mother, this fine young man determined that he would never do anything to disappoint or discredit her—or his father. Being away from his parents had become all the more reason to live as they had taught him and to honor them by living honorably and righteously himself.

Paul has said, "Honor thy father and thy mother; which is the first commandment with promise [and listen carefully to the promise]; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth" (Eph. 6:2–3). While we bring honor and happiness to our parents through living this great commandment, we, the children, receive the greatest blessings. All that we have and enjoy is the result and evidence of loving parents. Our forebears

sacrificed their all to leave us a legacy of freedom and peace. Our ancestors who embraced the gospel suffered hardships and trials to establish for us the true way of life. Our parents gave us our very lives.

May each of us live righteously so that we may qualify for the blessings that flow to those who honor their parents. May we all honor our parents by having faith in them, by being

obedient to their righteous counsel, and by living righteous lives through obedience to the commandments of God.

I testify to you from personal experience with this commandment that it is truly from God. Obedience to it will result in blessings for others as well as for ourselves. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.