

Sacred Relationships and Self-Reliance
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When one of my four daughters was very young—three or four years old—she started showing symptoms of self-reliance. Every time my husband or I would tell her she'd better not do something, she would respond with absolute conviction: "I can I want."

This, "I can I want attitude" helped her later in life to overcome her shyness in junior high, become a student-body leader in college, serve a mission, and now with her career, she supports her husband through school. This daughter in every stage and aspect of her life has known that if she wants to do something, she can do it with the Lord's help.

What does it mean being self-reliant?

It is the ability to care for ourselves and our families in all aspects of our life: that is our physical health, education, employment, home storage, finances, spirituality, as well as emotional and social well-being.

Why has the Lord placed so much emphasis on self-reliance? Adam was counseled to earn his own living—he was counseled to become self-reliant. We are taught that this principle is so important because it is tied very closely to freedom itself. When we depend on others, our freedom to act decreases.

In D&C 104:13–15, the Lord declares, "For it is expedient that I, the Lord, should make every man accountable, as a steward over earthly blessings, which I have made and prepared for my creatures.

"I, the Lord, stretched out the heavens, and built the earth, my very handiwork; and all things therein are mine.

"And it is my purpose to provide for my saints, for all things are mine."

The Lord has provided all we need for our sustenance. It is important that we constantly remember that all things belong to Him, that everything we have and everything we are we owe to the Lord. In his love and mercy for us, He'll never forsake us. He wants us to learn to take care of ourselves and our families with the talents and all the material blessings He'd given us. We cannot truly claim *anything* as a result of our efforts alone. Even our health, intelligence, and the favorable circumstances we enjoy are a gift from a loving Father in Heaven. We are stewards over these blessings.

In Mosiah 2:21, King Benjamin helps us understand how indebted we are to our Father: "I say unto you that if ye should serve him who has created you from the beginning, and is preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath, that ye may live and move and according to your own will, and even supporting you from one moment to another—I say, if ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants."

While serving as a missionary in Colombia, I read King Benjamin's powerful address to his people, given from his very heart. It touched me deeply, and for the first time I realized how insignificant and powerless I was. I felt my total dependence on the Lord. I started to understand the scope of His love for each one of us, His children. This understanding infused me with the desire to do my best, although I knew I would always remain indebted to Him.

As stewards of these blessings, we work towards self-reliance by learning and becoming educated individuals. The Lord has commanded us to teach one another. In D&C 88:77–79 He says: "And I give you a commandment that ye shall teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom . . . that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God."

So first, He wants us to learn about the gospel, the doctrine and the commandments. Let's see what else He wants us to learn. Verse 79 says, "Of things both in heaven [astronomy, maybe] and in the earth [perhaps geology, agriculture, geography, history] [things] which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass, things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms" The Lord has given us the commandment to learn about current events and signs of the times as well.

Through modern revelation, we learn that all things are spiritual unto the Lord: "All things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal" (D&C 29:34). The education that comes through spiritual channels, combined with the education we gain in the formal settings—schools and universities, or other places of learning—gives us wisdom and the ability to discern truth from error, enabling us to make better choices.

In Nephi's words, we'll understand, "the way the Lord deals with his children" and thus be better able to understand God and our fellowmen, which will deepen our love for

them. Can you see how education and learning give us freedom to choose, freedom to act, and the freedom to do much good?

Another option to become self-reliant is to start a business of your own. About eight years ago, I started thinking about this possibility after attending a class on finances where the idea was introduced. Running a small business from home was appealing to me, but I was also aware that most new small businesses fail within the first three years.

I decided on a business pursuit that I could handle, and went to the Lord's House fasting and praying to know if what I had chosen was also what He wanted me to do. Eight years later, that small business has paid for the missions of all four daughters, most of their college education, two weddings, and has kept us debt free. It has provided employment to many people and has even opened several opportunities to share the gospel.

At times when I've gone through a crisis with my business, I know that He has guided me and has sent the help that I needed. I've come to experience and understand what the Lord meant when He said, "All things unto me are spiritual" (D&C 29:34).

Bishop J. Richard Clark in his talk, "The Value of Work" suggests some elements of the work ethic. "As Latter-day Saints, if we would be true to our religion, we must perform high-quality work. It is a matter of integrity. Every piece of work we do is a portrait of the one who produced it. We are increasingly concerned with the diminishing quality of work in our society. On every hand we see shoddy workmanship for which full compensation is expected, whether the product meets acceptable standards or not. We must be motivated by a higher ideal than simply meeting the artificial standard of a society which has allowed inferior performance to be acceptable. That is not the Mormon ethic."

Bishop Clark continues, "Let us give full, honest effort to our jobs as though we owned the enterprise. In a very real sense, each of us is in business for ourselves, no matter who pays us. Be honest with your employer . . . Our employers should get the best we have in us, not just enough to get by or to meet the common standards."

We cannot become self-reliant without a willingness to work. Work is how we accomplish good things in our lives.

Let's teach our children with our example that work is a source of happiness, self-esteem and prosperity. This is our responsibility as parents. As we work side by side with our younger children, we can even change the name of "work" or "chore" to "play" or "game." In that way, they'll never know they're actually working!

Ours is a society that has too much of everything. Often we don't require our children to work to earn these privileges. Teaching them how to work is more than just something good that we might do for them; it is an essential part of salvation. Bishop Clark warns, "If we are to save our children temporally and spiritually, we must train them to work."

Some individuals and families, for reasons beyond their control, cannot become self-reliant. Impaired health, whether physical or mental, lack of access to resources, and other inhibitors may prevent some individuals from providing for themselves. Others may be trapped in a situation though no fault of their own, where they are affected by the wrong choices of others.

President Marion G. Romney in his talk, “The Celestial Nature of Self-Reliance,” helps us see the importance of giving and receiving: “We are all self-reliant in some areas and dependent in others. Therefore, each of us should strive to help others in areas where we have strengths. At the same time, pride should not prevent us from graciously accepting the helping hand of another when we have a real need. To do so denies another person the opportunity to participate in a sanctifying experience . . . The rich, by imparting of their surplus, participate in the eternal principle of giving. Once a person has been made whole, or self-reliant, he reaches out to aid others, and the cycle repeats itself.”

If we become self-reliant and can provide for all our needs, we have complete freedom to act, but we must use this freedom to have the spiritual goal to live God’s commandments and give to those in need. In the Book of Mormon, King Benjamin teaches how to succor those in need: “ye will administer of your substance unto him that standeth in need; and ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition to you in vain, and turn him out to perish” (Mosiah 4:16).

I have lived in three different countries in South America. The poor are in the streets, begging wherever you go, knocking on your door asking for food. Many are children. We may often think or say, “The man has brought upon himself his misery; therefore I will stay my hand, and will not give unto him of my food, nor impart unto him of my substance . . . for his punishments are just” (Mosiah 4:17).

If we think this, King Benjamin says we “have great cause to repent” (Mosiah 4:18), “for behold, are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same Being, even God, for all the substance which we have, for both food and raiment” (Mosiah 4:19)? Do you hear in these words of warning to us to not pass judgment to those who beg or stand in need?

In the United States the poor aren’t as visible, but still there are many in need who live in poverty. Many families are ravaged by death, disease, and drugs. What President Romney and King Benjamin are telling us is to wake up from the thought of “all is well in Zion.”

When we’re in a position to provide help to those in need until they are made whole, they in turn will be able to lift someone else. Thus we’re accomplishing one of the three purposes of the Church: perfecting the Saints.

In the same talk, President Marion G. Romney teaches how this principle is the means to an end. He says, “Can we see how critical self-reliance becomes when looked upon as the prerequisite to service, when we also know service is what godhood is all about? Without self-reliance one cannot exercise these innate desires to serve. How can we give if there is nothing there? Food for the hungry cannot come from empty shelves. Money to assist the

needy cannot come from an empty purse. Support and understanding cannot come from the emotionally starved. Teaching cannot come from the unlearned. And most important of all, spiritual guidance cannot come from the spiritually weak.”

Modern life has become more and more stressful for all of us, and sometimes our ability to cope is not enough, to the extent that we become spiritually poor and needy. President Spencer W. Kimball in his talk, “The False Gods We Worship,” made the following observation: “Many people spend most of their time working in the service of a self-image that includes sufficient money, stocks, bonds, investment portfolios, property, credit cards, furnishings, automobiles, and the like to guarantee carnal security . . . they hope a long and happy life.” Then he asked, “Do we have more of these good things than our faith can stand?”

If we aren’t using the resources we’ve been blessed with to build the Kingdom of God, we begin to starve ourselves spiritually.

To illustrate this principle, I’ll take you back to 1992 when our family lived in Chile for three years. Our Relief Society had planned a service project for a small orphanage. The sisters of the Tobalaba Ward offered to bring cakes for dessert and sing Primary songs to the 80 girls in the orphanage. The appointed day came. Only three sisters brought cake, two of which were very small. How could we provide dessert for 80 girls?

It wouldn’t be enough, but we decided to bring what little cake we had. The girls had already had their lunch and were waiting for their dessert. We sang some Primary songs first, and then three of the sisters, who had much more faith than I did at that time, went in the kitchen and started cutting the three cakes.

Some time went by, and I knew we be close to running out. I didn’t even want to think of having to decide who would get cake and who wouldn’t. Soon these three “angel sisters” came out with two trays filled with leftover cake!

With a big smile on her face, one said, “We don’t know what happened, but there was enough for all of them, plus the workers, and we have all this left over.”

A long time ago the Savior fed 5,000 with five loaves and two fishes. That day in the orphanage, He helped us understand that miracle. These sisters gave of what little they had, and in return, we were all spiritually fed, in abundance.

How does self-reliance help us honor the sacred relationships described in *The Family: A Proclamation to the World*? It says, “Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness.”

When parents take this sacred responsibility seriously and obey the commandment of teaching their children “to walk in the ways of truth and soberness . . . and to love one another,” (Mosiah 4:15) spiritual self-reliance will be knitted in the fabric of their young souls.

Children who are taught the principles of salvation at a young age are able to spiritually lift other adults, as in the case of Tessa Cowley of the Heritage Oaks Ward, in the Los Altos California Stake.

Tessa is a six-year-old girl who, the week before this last General Conference, decided to bear her testimony. She patiently sat in front of the chapel, waiting for her turn. When she approached the podium, she was prepared with a blank piece of paper and a couple of crayons.

She held the paper up and said, “Look at this paper. It is very clean like we are when we are born. Let’s say that you go to your friend’s house and you don’t obey your friend’s Mom.”

She then took a crayon and scribbled on the paper then said, “See? It’s a little dirty now. Then, let’s say you are mean to your little brother.”

She scribbled again. “What if you tell a lie.” Tessa colored some more and said, “Do you see? Now you’re dirty like this paper! But we can repent and be baptized, and because of Jesus we can become clean again.”

She turned the piece of paper to the other side and said, “See, it’s all white!” Then she added, “I heard this in Primary, and I told it to you because all of you needed to hear it too.”

There are many other children like Tessa in the Church throughout the world whose parents and Church leaders “are teaching them to walk in the ways of truth” (Mosiah 4:15), laying a spiritual foundation that will allow them to make right choices for their future.

In a home where the gospel principles of loving and serving one another are taught and lived, family members will better understand how to provide for their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, thus becoming more self-reliant.

I testify that the Lord knows each one of us, and is aware of our circumstances and needs. He is our Savior and Redeemer. All of us are His children, and we owe our lives and our all to Him, who paid the unfathomable price of the atonement for each one of us.