

“Train Up a Child in the Way He Should Go”

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Have you noticed that as you grow older, you cannot learn or memorize or study as well as you could when you were younger? Could that be why the prophet Alma counseled, "Learn wisdom in thy youth; yea, learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God" (Alma 37:35)?

As a young girl I often listened to such Broadway musicals as *Oklahoma*, *Music Man*, *Carousel*. I could sing at age ten from memory the words to a score of songs from these musicals. Today it takes me truly great effort to memorize new songs and scriptures, though in my youth the words were almost magically imprinted in my mind.

Youth is the easy time for learning. Truths taught at an early age will endure in the hearts of our children. We can see why it is important to teach our children the gospel of Jesus Christ and how to live it with joy in their early years.

I had five great pals when I was ten years old. One summer afternoon I discovered my friends had created a Five-Star Club in my absence. I realized that to be a member of this club I would need to be given a sixth point, and I quickly made that suggestion. But my friends said to me, "No, stars only have five points." I scurried on home and walked through the door. Mother was there, and I told her my sad tale. She wisely said to me, "Gayle, you can solve that with the help of your Heavenly Father." That night as I looked up at the sky I saw millions of stars shining brightly—each different. And I realized at that moment that Heavenly Father loved me because I had unique talents. He loved me, and he also loved everyone else, and I wanted to be like that. The next day my pals had forgotten that pointless Five Star Club, and we were friends again. But how grateful I am for impressions of the Spirit that were written in my heart that night.

Things that we learn in our youth might be stored away so that we might bring them back into focus and use them at later times, as I did from that experience.

In a special edition of Newsweek 2000, which focuses on early childhood learning, I read this: "Scientific breakthroughs have given us an extraordinary new understanding of early childhood—and a renewed appreciation for the importance of a parent's nurturing care. Early experiences affect children's later ability to learn and reason." ¹ We can see that science is confirming the truth of the scripture found in Proverbs 22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

The magazine went on to say something else: "It's easy to feel overwhelmed by the flood of advice

about raising your new child in magazines, in newspapers and on the Web. Don't. The real parenting expert is . . . you."[2](#)

And I would add, it is you because you are part of something divine. Your child is the child of Heavenly Father, and you can expect His help. In fact, you can't do it alone. You need Heavenly Father's help in raising His child.

All of us would agree that early training is important, but many of us have older children and even grandchildren. Is it too late? Never. We start where we are and go forward with faith to do our very best. Can't you just hear President Hinckley giving that advice?

As parents we see the growing culture of violence, rage, sex, and drugs. How can we counter Satan's unrelenting attempts to thwart our righteous efforts? I would like to suggest four ways: First: set a good example; second, love unconditionally; third, teach your children to recognize and avoid worldly intrusions on family values; and fourth, teach them to listen to and follow the prophet's counsel.

Let's start with your example. We teach our children all day, every day, whether we realize it or not. They pick up our habits, our values, and our prejudices from what we do and from what we are.

The *Church News* several Sundays ago said something wonderful. I quote, "It's been said Don Quixote's message is deceptively simple: If you want to be a knight, act like a knight. Bringing up civil sons and daughters follows a Quixote pattern. If parents want considerate, civil, children they need to first be considerate, civil men and women."[3](#)

The Lord said to Alma and the sons of Mosiah, "Go forth . . . that ye may show forth good examples unto them in me, and I will make an instrument of thee in my hands unto the salvation of many" (Alma 17:11). Now the "many" in this scripture can be our own children as well as those who haven't heard the gospel. Why? Because our children are really new converts.

Sister Hinckley recalled how on every 24th of July when she was growing up, her father would take her up Immigration Canyon to Little Mountain, where the pioneers first came over the hill into the valley. "We'd sit on the rocks," she said, "while he told us the story of his mother, Mary, and the suffering she experienced as part of the ill-fated Martin Handcart Company. They were caught in early winter storms as they made their way to join the Saints in the valley. Mary, my grandmother, lost two sisters; she lost a brother and finally her mother on the trail. Her toes were frozen and had to be amputated. She later married and had thirteen children. My father was the youngest of those children. And while the family sat on the rocks on Little Mountain, my father didn't lecture or moralize or anything like that. But the love and appreciation for his mother was transferred from his heart to ours. It was while I was still very young that I made up my mind I would stay true and faithful to the gospel so her suffering would not be in vain."[4](#)

Children learn to live the Savior's gospel when they join with their families from their earliest years onward in repeating the patterns of worship and service, study and work that He has ordained. If the family does not live by these patterns, the effectiveness of the parent's formal teaching will be limited at best. If the parents' way of life is inconsistent with their own spoken words, the children will tend to follow what the parents do more than what they say. But if the parents speak often of the Savior and establish His ways as their family pattern, they will teach their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," as Enos said he had been taught by his father (Enos 1:1).

What we are becoming, as Elder Oaks said in October conference 2000, gives us greater confidence in raising righteous children.[5](#) What we're becoming. As we are working to qualify for eternal life through a process of conversion ourselves, we discover it is not possible unless we are

doing it for the right reasons—the pure love of Christ.

That leads us to the second point in helping our children combat worldly influences:

Love our children unconditionally as Christ loves us. I think this is the easy part. Love is a gift given by the Spirit. As the scripture in Moroni 7:48 admonishes: "Pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ."

You cannot love until you have felt loved yourself. Closeness to the Savior fills you with a love and a desire to keep the Lord's commandments. This is the same thing for our children—the same process. Only in love can we teach correct principles, which can then become anchors in their lives. But these principles are not easy for us or our children to live until they become an established pattern of life. If the pattern is worthy of imitation, love will need to be the model. Course corrections are going to be made now and again, but wait to make these corrections until the heat of the moment has passed and then teach "by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned" (D&C 121:41).

To teach our children the gospel of Jesus Christ and to protect them from the influence of a wicked world, the pure love of Christ should be invited into our homes. It's going to take much listening and understanding for our children to feel they are of worth and that their feelings matter. How blessed are children who know their parents really care about them and that those parents, who care about them, love each other.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland quoting Elder Russell M. Nelson in this past conference gave an important message, not just for us as member missionaries but as parent missionaries to those new converts in our homes. "One of the first rules of medical inquiry is 'Ask the patient where it hurts. The patient,' he said, 'will be your best guide to a correct diagnosis and eventual remedy.' If we listen with love, we won't need to wonder what to say. It will be given to us—by the Spirit."[6](#)

Love flourishes when family members can participate in open, relaxed discussions. It often takes time, often unscheduled time, for that to occur. Elder Oaks said, "Three things never come back—the spent arrow, the spoken word, and the lost opportunity."[7](#) If we are so busy and stressed that we are too tired to calm a troubled child, or unkind words come quickly, we will miss opportunities to help our children know they are loved.

Elder M. Russell Ballard said, "Parents teach best when they lead by good example; govern their little ones with patience, kindness, and love unfeigned; and have the same spirit of love for children that Jesus exemplified."[8](#)

The third way we can help our children realize and combat the wicked influences of the world is to teach them to recognize and avoid those intrusions on your family values. It is not easy to be the right parent for each of our children. Each of them will have unique peer groups and unique learning styles. But there is One who does know what shield of faith each child will need to buckle on so firmly that it can neither be pulled off nor penetrated by the fiery darts of Satan. There is One who knows the difficulties our children will face and we will face as we love and teach them. In some instances those difficulties might be beyond our human power to resolve. But He watches us, and He knows what our children will need at every single moment. By the power of the Holy Ghost, He can tell us what to do as parents of His precious children. We need to be able to hear the voice of the Spirit and respond to its promptings.

Elder Richard G. Scott said this: "When, as mothers, you are consistently in the home, at least during the hours the children are predominantly there, you can detect the individual needs of each child and provide ways to satisfy them. Your divinely given instincts help sense a child's special

talents and unique capacities so that you can nurture and strengthen them."⁹ A father's and mother's love and sensitivity to the Spirit can bless the lives of their children.

We must teach our children at an early age to listen to the right voices, especially when so many voices are coming at them through the television and elsewhere. Children truly understand the quiet whisperings of the Spirit. If you ask a child and an adult when the last time your prayers were answered, the adult will take some time to think, but the child will quickly remember losing his ball and mitt, asking Heavenly Father, and finding it.

Several Sundays ago, two of our very young granddaughters, were learning by way of word and deed the Easter story. The inspired Primary leaders concluded the Sharing Time by singing with the children "Love One Another."¹⁰ Our daughter was leading the music and glanced at her two little girls dressed alike that day. Rachael and Sarah were hugging each other. Jesus said, "Love as I love," and those two little ones were touched by the whisperings of the Spirit. Lisa, their mother, shared with her daughters how grateful she was for their love for each other. That day she carefully taught the sweet workings of the Spirit to those little girls.

Because Lucifer loves our good kids, they need to be taught how to recognize the workings of the Spirit and also how to recognize the forces of evil. Give your children some ways to cast out dark thoughts. Perhaps from the Primary songbook "Hum Your Favorite Hymn"¹¹ might help or having pictures of the family laughing together posted on the fridge or in their lockers at school will help.

A good mother I know very well was struggling with one of her children who was being influenced by negative friends. She found herself resenting his defiant attitude, which was causing friction with the whole family. One day while she was working on the family albums, she ran across a favorite snapshot of her son when he was several years younger. His infectious grin brought back memories of the day that photo was taken. She posted that picture in her kitchen, and over the next several months she and her family began to focus on the image of that son and brother. A remarkable transformation began to occur. The defiant boy again became the lovable boy in the picture.

We need to supervise the media in our homes. Move the TV and possibly the computer out of the children's bedrooms and into a room where the family gathers. Watch just selected programs with your children and have a discussion afterwards. Take the time to point out that so much of what they see is not real life but lies packaged up in appealing ways.

Take time to eat with your family at least once a day. Discuss a news article on a subject of concern. Allow the children to have and express their own opinions, even if they differ from yours. Expressing opinions will help them formulate and internalize family values. Young children seem especially open to learning at bedtime—most likely because it postpones going to sleep—so take advantage.

My husband and I loved telling scripture stories and fables with moral values to our children. Each night we divided up the five children. He went to the bedrooms of some and I went with the others. Our little ones lay there in the peace and quiet, listening and asking many questions. We would often sing songs—old favorites, fun songs, and we even made up songs, although I have to say that my husband did the making up on those and it made the children feel good. Before we left the children, we prayed with them, staying on our knees just to visit. It was such a sweet time of sharing. Most of our teachings about worldly intrusions in our family came at these times or as we traveled to school and other activities. As much as we tried to plan meaningful family home evenings, the most important teaching moments that occurred in our family happened in informal times, one on one.

Lastly, we can listen and heed the prophet's counsel, the fourth way we can help our children to make good choices. And they can't do that if they don't know what he is saying. In President Gordon B. Hinckley's book *Standing for Something* is a chapter titled "The Family: We Can Save Our Nation by Saving Our Homes."¹² The need to accept responsibility for our role as parents is actually his

very first point. We had a blessed opportunity to live in South America—in Brazil and Argentina—for six years when our children were Primary age and younger. We arrived in Brazil unable to speak a word of the language, and we knew that until our own five little ones could begin to speak Portuguese, we would be the only gospel teachers in their lives. A particular question blessed our life greatly: What would your children know if you were the only gospel teachers in their lives?

President Hinckley counsels us to discipline and train our children with love and teach them to work and accept responsibility. They need to know the consequences of poor choices and also the joy of choosing the right. When they make mistakes, let the natural consequences occur, if possible. Catch your children doing something right instead of just when they do wrong, and praise them. They need to have responsibilities in the home without always being compensated. It is a privilege, truly, to be a member of each of your great families, and with that privilege comes responsibilities. Work alongside your children and teach them the joy of a job well done.

The last couple of months I have analyzed carefully four recent talks President Hinckley has given to the youth and their parents, [13](#) to the fathers in priesthood, [14](#) to the mothers in Relief Society, [15](#) and to the Young Women in the Young Women's general meeting. [16](#) I have looked for the manner in which he teaches, and the manner in which he teaches gives us great insight into how we can raise our children with sufficient faith to counter the fiery darts of the wicked. Look for the pattern as I go through this with you.

President Hinckley began every message *expressing love and gratitude* for the youth, and their parents, gratitude for their faith and the opportunity he had to teach them. He complimented his audience for specific things: "you have hearts of one kind, you love the Lord, you have a testimony, you pray." We could learn much from that.

The next thing he did was to *pray for direction from the Holy Spirit*. He had been on his knees asking the Lord to bless him with the power and the capacity and the language to reach into their hearts. He prayed for all those who would be teaching the youth. How blessed are children who hear their parents praying for them and all those they associate with.

The third thing he did was *give them vision*—"How good you look. You are sons and daughters of a loving Heavenly Father. Your future is bright with promise. Limitless is your potential. Magnificent is your future, if you will take control of it."

Next he used *catchy phrases and easily remembered slogans*—Young people are media wise and remember such short, pithy sayings as, How can I become the woman of whom I dream? Family slogans and traditions can unify and bond our children together, so why not give your children some sound bites? In my son's family a slogan that helps the three boys remember to treat each other kindly is, "We are a pack of wolves, and wolves stick together." That saying has been extended to "We are a pack of Cleggs, and Cleggs are loyal, honest," and so forth. The list grows as the boys are learning who they are.

President Hinckley also in every message *gave great hope for mistakes*, always teaching repentance "Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more" (D&C 58:42). He used that scripture three times.

He used *scripture stories to teach principles* And he also *taught simple and plain truths of the gospel directed by the Spirit* in a language understandable to his audience. Let's think back over some of those:

Be grateful

Be smart—Find your purpose in life. Everyone needs to obtain as much education as he or she can.

Be clean—He said that, and he also identified where sleaze is located (language, friends, entertainment, drugs, pornography, sexual impurity). He taught how to counter its effects, beginning with respect for our bodies. He was very direct and clear.

Be true, loyal, and faithful—and you will be blessed with happiness in this life and the life to come.

Be humble—There is no time for arrogance. The humble are teachable and willing to learn. They listen to the still small voice for guidance.

Be prayerful, he said. Pray for direction. You just can't do it alone.

Be honest—And then you can walk with your head held high.

Seek good friends

And he concluded with *look forward to being married in the house of the Lord*. What a great visual image to have a picture of a temple posted in our homes for our children to look to.

As he counseled the youth, so he gave the same advice to the parents. Therefore, I go back to *Our example is paramount*.

Lastly, in every talk he left his blessings and asked God's blessing on the youth. Would it bless the lives of our children if they could read that blessing? Could it be posted in some private place in our children's bedrooms? How important it is for our children to receive priesthood blessings from fathers or grandfathers or other worthy priesthood holders? Gospel truths lovingly taught by example at an early age will endure in the hearts of our children.

By seeking, listening, and responding to the Spirit, we will better be able to teach our children to recognize and avoid worldly intrusions on our family's values. Following the prophet's counsel can bring direction and peace into our families. Our children can counter the attacks of the adversary if they, with us, are becoming true disciples of Jesus Christ. That is my prayer for each one of you wonderful people who are here today, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

[1](#) *Newsweek*, Special Edition 2000

[2](#) Ibid.

[3](#) Jason Swensen, "Good Example Is the Best Way to Start," *Church News*, 10 March 2001.

[4](#) See *Glimpses into the Life and Heart of Marjorie Pay Hinckley*, ed. Virginia H. Pearce (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999), 200.

[5](#) See Dallin H. Oaks, "The Challenge to Become," *Ensign*, November 2000, 32-34.

[6](#) Jeffrey R. Holland, "Witnesses unto Me," *Ensign*, May 2000, 15.

[7](#) Dallin H. Oaks, "Focus and Priorities," *Ensign*, May 2001, 84.

[8](#) M. Russell Ballard, "Teach the Children," *Ensign*, May 1991, 80.

[9](#) Richard G. Scott, "Correct Principles Can Make Life Joyous and Satisfying," *Ensign*, May 1993, 32.

[10](#) "Love One Another," *Children's Songbook* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989), 136.

[11](#) *Ibid.*, 152.

[12](#) Gordon B. Hinckley, *Standing for Something: Ten Neglected Virtues That Will Heal Our Hearts and Homes* (New York: Times Books, 2000).

[13](#) Gordon B. Hinckley, "A Prophet's Counsel and Prayer for Youth," *Ensign*, January 2001, 2-11.

[14](#) Gordon B. Hinckley, "Great Shall Be the Peace of Thy Children," *Ensign*, November 2000, 50-53.

[15](#) Gordon B. Hinckley, "Your Greatest Challenge, Mother," *Ensign*, November 2000, 97-100.

[16](#) Gordon B. Hinckley, "How Can I Become the Woman of Whom I Dream?" *Ensign*, May 2001, 93-96.

