

"Yea, They Had Been Taught by Their Mothers"

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It is an honor to be with you today and to talk about the influence of mothers. The title of this session comes from Alma. It speaks of the sons of Helaman: "And they were all young men, and they were exceedingly valiant for courage . . . but behold, this was not all—they were men who were true at all times. . . . Yea, they had been taught by their mothers, that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them" (Alma 53:20, 56:47). They wore the armor of faith. We all want our children to have that strength. How do we do it in the twenty-first century?

I want to introduce you to my family as they were twenty-two years ago. My husband and I recognize that our children have blessed us with the challenges that we needed as a couple, and I hope that we have been at the crossroads for them. Together we have learned. They are the reference and the only reason that I really have anything to offer today, because raising children is an awesome, life changing experience. George Will stated that idea well when he said, "Biologically, adults produce children. Spiritually, children produce adults. Most of us do not grow up until we have helped children do so."[1](#)

My dear sisters, I would like to announce that the best "Adult Education Class" is your own children. My experience with that class began in September of 1958. We had been married just four months, I was teaching school, and my husband was attending dental school at Northwestern University in Chicago. We were expecting our first baby. I quote from Genesis, "Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children" (3:16). Well, morning sickness is sorrowful, but it is especially challenging if the morning part lingers all day. After months of this flu-like experience, I finally began to feel better when I discovered that my wardrobe had shrunk to the same three outfits; I had multiplied. By the end of nine months, I was willing to do almost anything just to feel normal again—even endure childbirth. Besides, I remembered the promise in the scriptures which states, "Notwithstanding . . ." (that word covers everything connected to childbirth, and only those who have given birth know what I am

talking about) "Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing" (1Timothy 2:15).

Then the miracle happened to me.

At the birth of our first daughter, I forgot about those long nine months.

I fell in love with that tiny little head, those squeaky little noises, the doubled up skinny legs, the tiny bit of hair, and her soft little neck all wrapped up in a hospital blanket. The baby smell was intoxicating, and I was smitten forever. To watch her 6' 4" dad hold that tiny bundle and express his admiration with one dozen red roses, purchased in our poverty, will forever hold my appreciation for the instruction, "Multiply, and replenish the earth" (Genesis 1:28).

How did the Lord know children would be such a gift? How did He know it would greatly humble us and mold us into a more acceptable human being? How did he know our priorities would change, and we would be so happy? How did He know that having children would increase our need for Him? How did He know that we needed to receive them as babies and not teenagers? Dear sisters, He knew, because it is His pattern for us, and it was given to us from the beginning. We bear children. It is part of the Plan of Happiness, and our first parents, Adam and Eve, were instructed concerning the plan. The pattern never changes. It may be delayed in this life but we are promised blessings here and eternal life in the world to come.

What has gone wrong in the world? Families are at risk. Children are at risk. We are aware of the stark statistics around the world of illegitimate births, divorce, percentage of children living in single-parent homes, and teenage suicide. There is moral and spiritual decay.

There are just too many signs of civilization gone rotten. William J. Bennett commented concerning our times in these words: "The worst of it has to do with our children. Apart from the numbers and the specific facts, there is the on-going, chronic crime against children: the crime of making them old before their time. We have become inured to the cultural rot. People are experiencing atrocity overload, losing their capacity for shock, disgust, and outrage."²

When we *choose* to move out of the pattern that God has given us, we suffer, our children suffer, and our eternal life suffers. Generally speaking, the following is true:

Men take care of things.

Women take care of people.

If women leave and take care of things,

No one takes care of people.

One of the significant problems in society is that moms have gone to seek after things.

Women do a great job in the "thing" world. They are intelligent, organized, and enthusiastic. They make wonderful doctors, lawyers, merchants, and chiefs. They justly receive recognition for these achievements, but the home does not do a great job without her. The people suffer—husbands and children.

The home becomes unorganized, cluttered, too busy for the small stuff, and too involved to hear the unexpressed hopes and dreams of those who are most dear. Priorities and successes move into things at work, places, and position. Molding souls takes a careful recipe book, and the right proportions at the right time have to be blended with patience, love, understanding, and time—full time. Mothers cannot expect to receive full-time benefits from the Lord with part-time work at her post. In simple language, Mom needs to return to her divine calling—the home.

Please know that I am not referring to those faithful women who do the best they can, rearing children alone or under difficult circumstances. Some have few choices. I am certain that the Lord gives them extra capacity. We know that God is aware of each of us, and of our place in time, because He gave us the pattern and our divine calling.

Sisters, what is occurring in the world does not have to happen in our homes if we are not absent parents. We live in a wonderful time in the gospel. We have the scriptures, which contain all truth and light and is our manual for learning how to rear our children. We have the words of our living prophets.

Let me quote from the Proclamation on the Family: "Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children. . . . Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, to teach them to love and serve one another, to observe the commandments of God. . . .

" . . . Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children."³ It is our calling.

To nurture children we must have something to give and somewhere to turn for a sure grasp on truth. My personal testimony of God, Christ, the Restoration, and living prophets is my greatest tool in influencing my children. It has been my armor, and never have I been let down by following the words of the prophets pertaining to our family or our decisions. I am blessed with a righteous husband for which I thank my Father in Heaven every day. He has presided over our family in love and righteousness. He has provided the necessities of life and protected our family.

When I was learning to drive, it was before Drivers Education. My father instructed me that if I would look down the road a distance, instead of just viewing the road barely in front of the car, I would drive straighter; I would see traffic entering the highway; I could judge the distance better; and I would be more aware of the total movement in my vision. Rearing children is much like driving.

It is easier to direct our children down the road of life if we look ahead and realize that what

we do right now will have consequences down the road. It will help us to direct them in straighter paths and give us courage to make the difficult decisions. For example, our children did not date until they were sixteen as had been suggested by our leaders. That posed a few challenges. Our second daughter was a cheerleader, and it was the Homecoming dance. She had been asked by the quarterback of the football team. We knew his parents, he was a wonderful young man, and our daughter was so flattered that he would ask a lowly sophomore to the dance. If you are looking in front of the car, it is easy to rationalize that under this set of circumstances, it would be permissible. But, if you want your daughter to follow the words of the prophets down the long road of life, there would be only one response. She chose to follow the leaders.

When challenges with our children are particularly difficult, and there seems no solution, we have an individual tutor, but we have to be in tune and walk by faith. That tutor is the Holy Ghost. "And by the power of the Holy Ghost, ye shall know the truth of all things" (Moroni 10:5).

I have a friend whose son played football. They had a very successful year, and one of the fathers (not a member of the Church) threw a party for the team. As a gift he presented each of the players a six-pack of beer. My friend's son brought the six-pack home, said nothing, and put it under his bed. Monday morning after the children had left for school, my friend was gathering the clothes for the wash and looked under the bed for stray socks. There she discovered the six-pack. At first she felt anger, which was followed by a feeling of hurt. How many other things had he hidden? Where had she failed? Her next impression came from the Spirit.

It was Monday, family home evening. She would prepare a special dinner with flowers and decorations. She set the table with all those lovely things. Then at each place, she set a can of beer. Her high school son arrived home first, and, smelling the wonderful aroma, asked who was coming for dinner. She explained that they were having a special family home evening. He headed for the dining room. Upon seeing the beer at each place, he was horrified and quickly gathered all six cans and threw them into the large trash container in the garage. He said nothing. She said nothing. The problem was solved with not so much as a word. Several weeks later he remarked, "Mother, you have brought so much love and light into this home—beer did not fit the scene. I am sorry." The Spirit wins every time, if we have ears to hear those promptings.

Lead your children; they will follow. The same is not true if we walk behind them with a whip. If we are going to lead our children, we as mothers have to live what we want our children to learn. We need to set an example of self-respect through our own lives. Self-respect shows in dress, manners, speech, and in our surroundings—how we keep our homes. That means we have to work on ourselves, so that we present to our children the image we want them to follow. President Harold B. Lee spoke of this problem, "When we see one devoid of respect for himself, as indicated by his conduct, his outward appearance, his speech, and his utter disregard of the basic measures of decency, then certainly we are witnessing the frightening aspect of one over whom Satan has achieved a victory."⁴

As women in the Church of Jesus Christ, how do we dress? Our children will follow. How do we speak? Our children will listen and learn. How do we treat our homes? The size does not matter, but the order and peace do. Comfort has been women's mode of the nineties. "Fine twined linen" has been replaced with "duty-dredged denim." When our children only see us in blue jeans and tee-shirts morning until night, that casual attire will be their choice. What we wear indicates our respect for where we are, and what we are doing. I've noticed jeans or sweats worn to wedding receptions, ballets, and concerts. They are common at weekday meetings in the chapels, and surely our children will find it acceptable to do the same. It is difficult to be gracious women in tee-shirts and faded levis frayed on the bottom. John Updike put it this way, "The fact that . . . we still live well cannot ease the pain of feeling that we no longer live nobly." [5](#)

The following came from a recent newspaper article: "Despite the cliched admonition to never judge a book by its cover, most people do exactly that. Observe the social dynamics of restaurants or airports, or department stores: a person in a suit commands much more respect than a person in tattered blue jeans. . . . clothes send very loud signals about a person's maturity, education, and philosophy. No one believes that respect will automatically follow button-down shirts . . . It must be laboriously earned and carefully cultivated. But the reality is that image does matter. Clothes send signals, particularly to young students." [6](#)

I would like to add, clothes send signals to our children about what is important to us. The interesting phenomena in our time is that everything is acceptable. No one is shocked by your hair (green, pink, or purple—long, short, or shaved) or whether you desire less clothes for attention, or more clothes than logical. No one is surprised by what is pierced or not pierced in both men and women. If we want a more beautiful people sending signals to the world about maturity, education, and philosophy, we must *choose* to look like sons and daughters of Christ, and that *choice* needs to begin at home.

Standards bless our homes. Children should be introduced to those standards while they are young. Teaching children has been likened to a basketball game. For the first eight minutes, the home team (that's us) can make all the points they wish without opposition. A smart coach (the parents) would instruct the team (that's our children) to stand as close as possible to the basket, making as many baskets as fast as possible before the eight-minute bell rang. The home team (that's us) would be so far ahead when the opposition stepped in the game that even if our team made a few mistakes, we would still win the game of life. We have that opportunity, because Satan cannot tempt our children until they are eight. Let's hope we don't waste those years searching for the ball.

I do not know who said this but I want to share it with you: "Everyday! In these two words can be found the secrets of all attainment. It's not what we do once, with all our hearts and with every splendid ounce of strength that counts, so much as the things we have been doing everyday, whether we felt like it or not." [7](#)

The everyday habits from early childhood provide our children with a consistent anchor. Habits also mold us as parents. I want to give you eighteen habits that helped our children

acquire the desire and goals of missions, temple marriage, and personal testimony. These habits did not originate with us. They come from the prophets, modern and ancient.

Habit 1. Family Prayer—Everyday

Family prayer invites the Spirit. It brings peace, comfort, and understanding among family members.

Habit 2. Scripture Study—Everyday

The scriptures teach our children of Christ. As Nephi instructed us, "And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins"

Habit 3. Family Home Evening—Each week

Family home evening may not be perfect for you every week. It is probably more imperfect than it is perfect, but your steadfastness in keeping that charge will make the total experience very sweet. It is a perfect setting to teach our values and standards, and how they differ from the world.

Habit 4. Work and Individual Responsibility—Everyday

My husband and I purchased eighty acres in the Idaho countryside, and we built our home. One of our purposes in moving out of the city was to give our children a place to play and work. Sometimes his patients in the office would ask him what he was raising on his farm, and he would reply, "Kids." We found that work and responsibilities were key factors in the lives of all of our children. They had opportunities to raise corn, feed animals, plant and harvest, water crops, and enjoy the earnings from their labor.

Habit 5. Keeping the Sabbath Day Holy—Every Sunday

Our older children were young when the church moved to the three-hour block. We had been so accustomed to remaining in our Sunday clothes all day because of morning and afternoon meetings that we kept that custom as a family standard. We decided that Sunday was the Lord's day and that it did not last just three hours, but all day. We planned lovely, but easy, dinners. We ate in the dining room, using our best tableware, and just enjoyed each others company—laughing, singing, talking about our classes at church or gospel subjects.

Habit 6. Time for Developing Talents—Everyday

Habit 7. Eating meals together—Everyday

Meals are magic. They touch the senses of smell, taste, and feeling. Love can be spread at

dinner. It is a safe and together time. It can be a good moment for scripture reading, family prayers, or a discussion about the day. I hope our homes are not just "fast food joints" where children reach for the cold cereal and milk and watch television while they dine; then the dishes are added to the already big pile or left on the floor in the family room.

Habit 8. Supporting Church Programs—As scheduled

Primary, Young Women, Young Men, Sunday School, seminary, scouting, and other activities—these inspired organizations have blessed the lives of our children with the teaching of the gospel, good friends, talented leaders, character growth, leadership development, and wonderful activities. They are worth our support.

A bright joyful attitude should be a natural part of LDS women because we have so many blessings. If we realize and appreciate these blessing, our position toward the everyday work of rearing children would be an attitude of gratitude.

I have the luxury of being older and a witness to the results of these habits in the lives of my children. I am grateful that all of our children chose to serve missions and those that are married have chosen to marry in the temple.

What will save our children? Their own personal testimony. That is their armor. They will *choose* a righteous life, personal purity, missions, temple marriage, and following the prophets because they have learned through the habits of their home, the example of their parents, the teachings of the church, and the revelations of the Spirit that the gospel is true. Sometimes children will stand all alone among their friends. Sometimes parents stand all alone in the world. Remember a strong testimony is not learned at one family night, or at one scripture reading, or in one Sunday School class. It is experienced and internalized every day. We learn as we live. "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). "Yea, they had been taught by their mothers. . . . We do not doubt our mothers knew it" (Alma 56: 47–48). That is why good habits are so important to success. No one succeeds beyond the purpose to which we are willing to surrender our time. Christ is our center. Our righteous habits lead us to Him. The Spirit reveals Him to us.

This is a picture of our family today, they are my jewels and I love each one of them. I would like to share this plaque with you that my children gave to me shortly after our last child graduated from high school. I treasure it for many reasons.

It reads:

"Master Teacher"

1964–1996

Carol Hillam

FOREVER GRATEFUL

–Linda, Rodney, Bonnie, Glenn, Mark, Ryan, and Jared.

It should read:

Master Teachers

My dear children,

Linda, Rodney, Bonnie, Glenn, Mark, Ryan, and Jared,

to whom I own life's greatest challenges,

dearest moments,

and most darling grandchildren.

Forever Grateful

Mom

I bear you my witness that God lives, Christ is our Savior, and families can be together forever even in the twenty-first century. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

1. George F. Will.
2. William J. Bennett.
3. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, November 1995, 102.
4. Harold B. Lee, *Stand Ye in Holy Places* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 12.
5. John Updike.