

Families—It's about Time

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Families and mothers and mothering and the time we spend in these endeavors are of the utmost importance. There are many debates about mothering and time. Life in today's world places a multitude of demands on a woman's resources of time and energy. We can choose to apply our talents in more arenas than ever before. But there are only a few of those places in which our influence is irreplaceable. The family is one of those places.

There is good reason to be concerned about the quality of family life within many homes. Challenges to families today are tremendous. We must choose where we will spend the best of our time.

A woman who had a magnificent garden was asked, "What is your gardening secret?"

Her answer was simple. "I stay close to the garden," she replied. "I go into my garden every day, even when it isn't convenient. And while I'm there, I look for little signs of possible problems, things like weeds and insects and soil conditions that are simple to correct if caught in time but that can become overwhelming if left unchecked."

It takes time to grow a beautiful garden. It also takes time to grow a celestial family. The family is a sacred institution. Our Heavenly Father designed it that way. The relationships within the family should be the most important relationships we have with any humans on earth. It is through the organization of the family that the Lord's purposes are fulfilled. What happens in families can affect an entire nation.

President Gordon B. Hinckley has said, "The strength of the nations lies in the homes of the people. God is the designer of the family. He intended that the greatest of happiness, the most satisfying aspects of life, the deepest joys should come in our associations together and our concerns one for another as fathers and mothers and children" (*Ensign*, May 1991, 74).

Think of the significance of this: In a world where everyone is seeking after fulfillment and happiness, President Hinckley says the greatest happiness, the deepest joys, come in our families.

Napoleon Bonaparte was once asked what was the greatest need of France. To this question he gave his famous one-word answer: "Mothers" (quoted by Sterling W. Sill, *Principles, Promises, and Power* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973], 154).

Sisters, I want to congratulate you for all you do to strengthen your families, for the time you invest in each family member. I know it is difficult in the best of circumstances. I know it takes sacrifice and dedication and total commitment. I compliment you for your investment of time in your families. I want to talk about the timeliness of that investment.

President Thomas S. Monson tells us, "Time is the raw material of life. Every day unwraps itself like a gift, bringing us the opportunity to . . . evolve into something better than we are at its beginning. Success is contingent upon our effective use of the time given us" (*Pathways to Perfection* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973], 109–10). As President Monson suggests, our success and our use of time closely correlate. Creating a celestial family takes time.

What are we doing with our time for heaven's sake? That question has never been more significant than it is in these last days when time is in short supply in more ways than one. Elder Neal A. Maxwell said: "When the real history of mankind is fully disclosed, . . . will what happened in cradles and kitchens prove to be more controlling than what happened in congresses? When the surf of the centuries has made the great pyramids so much sand, the everlasting family will still be standing, because it is the celestial institution, formed outside telestial time" (*Ensign*, May 1978, 10–11).

I remember the time I spent as a young girl every fall working in the kitchen with my mother canning peaches. I would sit for hours peeling that fuzzy, sticky fruit. As I sat at my peeling station working away, the juice ran down my arms in little streams right to my elbows. I can remember to this day how miserable that felt.

But every once in a while, I would pop one of those beautiful, reddish-orange, perfectly ripe beauties into my mouth. I figured it was my pay for the sticky elbows. Knowing that when we were finished, we would have to clean the entire kitchen—the floors, counters, sinks, dishes, everything—I sometimes wondered why we didn't just bag the whole mess and buy canned peaches from the store.

But every fall, despite knowing the awful mess we would have to clean up, my mother and I canned peaches. And as we did, we talked—my mother and I. And I would watch her. She moved about the kitchen with such skill, filling the bottles so carefully that each one looked worthy of a prize at the state fair. She would pour the sweet syrup over the peaches, put on the lids, and lower the bottles into the canner for processing.

As Mom and I canned those wonderful fruits on warm, autumn days, I would

imagine a cold, snowy January. Even though it was hard, messy work in September, I knew that in January we would be happy we had spent the time and gone through all the mess and trouble of canning those peaches.

Everyone in our family loved peaches. We loved the fruit, but we also loved what it represented: the many ways Mother took care of us. Over those bottles of peaches and in a thousand other ways, I learned as my mother and I spent time together. I learned such basic and meaningful lessons—the importance of family, stories of my ancestors. From her I learned about Jesus Christ and other lessons too numerous to mention.

I learned in my childhood from the time spent with my mother in our family kitchen that what happens at home never leaves us. The influence mothers have on their children will last, just as the celestial institution of family will endure.

Those bushels of peaches my mother and I labored over year after year are one type of fruit—a celestial kind. Our time together and all I learned during it represent another fruit—a fruit of celestial connections, and that fruit is delicious forever.

A wonderful line from Proverbs says, "My fruit is better than gold" (Proverbs 8:19). How true when it comes to time spent with our families. Sisters, the fruits of your time spent with and for your families are indeed better than gold.

Time passes so quickly. We cannot hoard it. We cannot buy it. We can only use it wisely. We must place the appropriate value on time, that sacred, precious commodity.

President Ezra Taft Benson told us that "a child needs a mother more than all the things money can buy. Spending time with your children is the greatest gift of all" (*Come, Listen to a Prophet's Voice* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990], 32).

Once, when I was a grown woman, I was sick. I just knew that if I could have a bottle of my mom's home-canned peaches, I would feel better. My mother gave me a bottle, and I did feel better as soon as I popped off the lid and tasted that delicious fruit, which reminded me of her and those many hours we spent together. The gift of time my mother gave me as we toiled over those peaches has proven to be a gift that keeps on giving.

The Savior taught, "By their fruits ye shall know them" (3 Nephi 14:20). I think that means in part that we as wives, mothers, grandmothers, aunts, sisters, daughters, and cousins bear a sacred responsibility to invest our time in our families so that our family members will be and will bear good fruit.

My son was only two years old and not yet talking perfectly when he said to me one day, "Do you know why mudders is so important?" I said, "No. Tell me why." He replied, "Because their boys luvses dem so much." As you can imagine, that is a precious memory I will always treasure.

Your lives are valuable because you are invaluable to your children and your other

family members. No one can do what you do in your family. You who work so diligently to create an environment of righteousness in your home are performing a service that cannot be bought. The fruit of your labor is sweet and rare. You are making the best use of your time when you take time to put your families first. I know it's not easy. In fact, it's a thankless job at times. For most of us there are days when family life can be very trying.

Often we find ourselves barely able to keep up with the diverse needs of various family members with no time at all left to address our own. That can be so frustrating. I remember one harried morning about a year and a half after my marriage. I had been up all night with a crying baby, who was still crying on one shoulder and had left her milky mark on the other. Needless to say, no grooming rituals had found their way onto the morning's agenda; I hadn't even combed my hair. The doorbell rang in my basement apartment. When I answered it, standing there was a salesman who happened to be a former boyfriend. I wanted to disappear. I'll bet he thought, *Boy, am I glad I didn't marry her.* As mothers we are often in a position where the needs of others come before our own.

President Gordon B. Hinckley reminds us, "Sacrifice is and always has been the very essence of motherhood" (*Motherhood, a Heritage of Faith*, pamphlet [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995], 4). You can expect that not all that sacrifice will be fully appreciated. You can expect the world to look past or not value your accomplishments. But you can feel peace in knowing that you are making the best use of your time when you use it to help your loved ones.

The Proclamation on the Family is such a marvelous resource. Sometimes, on a particularly busy day, I have paused to read the sentence, "Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children" (*Ensign*, November 1995, 102). And I think seldom have so few words suggested so much to so many.

The nurture of children is a monumental responsibility and a glorious one. President Ezra Taft Benson reminded us, "Motherly teaching takes time—lots of time" (*Come, Listen to a Prophet's Voice*, 35). Good mothering involves body, mind, and spirit. And because it does, each of us must choose how to spend our time in fulfilling this eternal responsibility. In the Doctrine and Covenants we are warned, "Do not run faster or labor more than you have strength" (D&C 10:4).

Sisters, focus on what you can do as a mother in the time that you have. Mothering does take lots of time, but you can't do everything. So, prayerfully consider your family's needs and personalities. Prioritize your tasks according to your circumstances. Then, attend to those needs as best you can in the time you have. Value your family time because it is priceless. Do the best you can. If you've honestly done your best, then don't feel guilty. Just thank Heavenly Father for your family and your opportunity to serve, nurture, enjoy, and teach them.

You may have to let go of some tasks in order to spend your time on what matters most. Here are a couple of pieces of homespun advice from anonymous sources. You may

have heard them before.

Cleaning and scrubbing can wait till tomorrow,
For babies grow up, we've learned to our sorrow;
So quiet down cobwebs; dust, go to sleep.
I'm rocking my baby—and babies don't keep.

And this:

Cleaning the house
While the children are growing
Is like shoveling snow
While it's still snowing.

Not every woman will marry. Not every woman will bear children. It is my sincere and heartfelt desire that those who are among that number are not hurt by all these comments about mothering and families. First, remember that all belong to a family. Second, mothering also can and must be done by aunts, sisters, cousins, and so on. We can strengthen families without being the mother.

I saved a Christmas card I received from a friend whose elderly aunt died during the year. My friend wrote, "We lost our dear Aunt Alice, who was ninety-six years old. A great deal of fun, love, loyalty, and testimony went with her. She was the glue that held the family together. An avid genealogist, she never neglected any of her living relatives, either. Single all her life, she extended her interest to all the family members and was the main source of interfamilial news."

What a tribute. Look at what Aunt Alice did for her family. She was fun, she gave love, and she helped others grow in testimony as she shared her faith and devotion to her Father in Heaven and the gospel with family members. I believe one of the most impressive statements from this Christmas letter is "she was the glue that held the family together." Aunt Alice understood that her roles in the family were sacred and that her contribution made a difference.

I salute all of you who work hard at your family relationships, who make them sacred relationships. As wives, mothers, grandmothers, aunts, sisters, daughters, and cousins we can do so much for our family members. We can give them the best of our time.

The Church's *Family Guidebook* reminds us: "The family is the most important unit in time and eternity. God has established families to bring happiness to his children, to allow them to learn correct principles in a loving atmosphere, and to prepare them for eternal life" ([pamphlet, Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1992], iv). Because it is true that family units are the most important units in time and eternity, let us make our time now the best of times for our families. Let's talk about ways to do that.

If You Are Married, Take Time to Strengthen Your Relationship with Your Husband

I had my first date with my husband, Rees, in June. We were engaged in October and married the next April. During our courtship, I enjoyed long, intellectual talks with him in a relaxed atmosphere. We would sit in front of my parents' fireplace and talk about politics and the Church. I thought that was how life would be. So, that Christmas before we were married, I gave Rees a dinner jacket and two beautiful glasses with hollow stems. I imagined he would come home from work, and we would share a delicious, gourmet dinner prepared, of course, by my hands. We would retire to the living room and sip grape juice. He would wear his handsome dinner jacket. I would look beautiful. We would discuss very important subjects.

Well, we married, and reality hit. Just before we celebrated our first anniversary, we welcomed our first child into our family. During the pregnancy, I experienced severe morning sickness. The view my nearly new husband had most of the time was of me doubled over in the bathroom. I did not look beautiful. The only time the hollow-stemmed glasses were used was much later when our children discovered them in the cupboard and filled them with red Kool-Aid. The dinner jacket was used once—as part of a Halloween costume. The dinners I made were not that delicious. And the most stimulating things we discussed had to do with how many ways we could eat hamburger, which was the only thing we could afford. I have learned that marriage and family life have little to do with dinner jackets and fancy glasses. Life is much more about smiling as we dine on hamburger casseroles and loving one another even when we are not dressed in fancy clothes or looking beautiful. The love you and your spouse have for each other creates harmony in the home and is the all-important base of family stability.

Take Time to Build a Foundation of Timeless Values

Family relationships and eternal values are two of the few things that are timeless. Think about that. Houses, jobs, cars, and so much of what composes our mortal days are only part of this world. They will not be with us eternally. But our family members and the glorious truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ endure eternally.

The question we must ask ourselves is "How can we make our family a truly celestial institution?" even though some days the most immediate question is "How can I find enough time to do the laundry?" When so many demands yank at us, family life and celestial life may seem to have little in common. The home is a celestial workshop. The timeless values of the gospel—like peach juice—stick everywhere. And sticky is not all that bad. The gospel values we teach and live permeate everything in a home. They help us stick together as family members.

President Ezra Taft Benson challenged us: "Mothers, teach your children the gospel in your own home. . . . This is the most effective teaching that your children will ever receive. This is the Lord's way of teaching. The Church cannot teach like you can. The school cannot. The day-care center cannot. But you can, and the Lord will sustain you"

(Elect Women of God, pamphlet [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992], 10).

I have read the scriptural reminder of some behaviors of those who lack a foundation of faith: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, . . . and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Timothy 4:3–4).

We live in the time of such fables and in a world only too anxious to turn unto them. In such a time we must teach the doctrines as we also live them. This is the commandment of the Lord: "Inasmuch as parents have children in Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized, that teach them not to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, when eight years old, the sin be upon the heads of the parents. . . . And they shall also teach their children to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord" (D&C 68:25, 28).

Take time to tell your children how much the gospel means to you. Take time to explain to them why we spend so much of our time in our church activity and why these things are important in our lives and theirs. Take time to teach them about the Savior and what he did for them and for all of us.

An evidence of the teaching of timeless values by a great mother is illustrated in a missionary story. In the early days of the Southern States Mission, there was much persecution of missionaries. Elder Frank Croft was a missionary in the state of Alabama. One day he was forcibly taken to a secluded spot in the backwoods to be beaten with a whip across his bare back at the hands of armed and vicious men. Elder Croft was commanded to remove his coat, shirt, and garments, and bare his body to the waist. Then he was stood against a nearby tree to which his arms and body were tied to prevent his moving while being lashed. Having no alternative, he complied with the demands of the mob, but in so doing, there fell from his pocket a letter he had recently received from his mother. Elder Croft, a short time before, had written his parents a letter seriously condemning mob violence. The letter that had fallen from his coat was an answer from his mother. In it she counseled, "My beloved son, you must remember the words of the Savior when He said, 'Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven'; also 'Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my name's sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad for great is your reward in heaven for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.' Also remember the Savior upon the cross suffering for the sins of the world when he uttered these immortal words: 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.' Surely, my boy, they who are mistreating you elders know not what they do, or they would not do it. Sometime, somewhere, they will understand, and then they will regret their action and they will honor you for the glorious work you are doing. So be patient, my son; love those who mistreat you and say all manner of evil against you and the Lord will bless you and magnify you in their eyes and your mission will be gloriously successful. Remember also, my son, that day and night, your mother is praying for you always."

Elder Croft, tied to the tree, saw the leader of the mob pick up the fallen letter and

decide to read it before giving the word to his men to start the lashing. The elder observed the hardness of his features, the cruelty in his eyes. No sympathy could be expected from him. Elder Croft closed his eyes in resignation and, awaiting the moment when the beating would begin, thought of home and loved ones and particularly of his beloved mother. Then he silently uttered a prayer in her behalf.

Opening his eyes a moment or two later and feeling that the leader had had time to finish reading the letter, he was amazed to see the change in the man's countenance. Much of the hardness and cruelty in his face was gone; his eyes were slightly dimmed by moisture. His whole personality appeared to have changed.

To Elder Croft, it seemed an awfully long time elapsed before the mob leader arose and, approaching the helpless elder, said: "You must have a wonderful mother. You see, I once had one, too." Then, addressing the other members of the mob, he said, "Men, after reading this Mormon's mother's letter, I just can't go ahead with the job. Maybe we had better let him go." Elder Croft was released and went his way, and the loving influence of his mother seemed very near (Bryant S. Hinckley, *The Faith of Our Pioneer Fathers* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1956], 257–59).

An excellent place to teach family members timeless values is family home evening. There is great benefit from holding family home evening each week. A family may consist of one person or of a husband and wife and children. One of our Relief Society General Board members who is a single woman and lives alone tells us she holds family home evenings—sometimes by herself, sometimes with others. But she feels the benefits of family home evening.

In the Church's *Family Guidebook*, we find this promise from the First Presidency: "We promise you great blessings if you will follow the Lord's counsel and hold regular family home evenings. We pray constantly that parents in the Church will accept their responsibility to teach and exemplify gospel principles to their children. May God bless you to be diligent in this most important responsibility" ("Message from the First Presidency," *Family Home Evening Resource Book* [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1983], iv).

I believe President Benson when he says the Lord will sustain us as we take time to teach our children and other family members. Gospel reality reminds us that families, like gospel values themselves, are timeless and therefore worthy of constant monitoring. The fruit of timeless, celestial lessons learned is delicious forever.

Take Time to Teach Your Children to Love and Enjoy One Another

Now is the time to enjoy each other. Recreation is such an important part of the time we share with family members. Children should be able to look back at the time spent in the family home as a time of great happiness and joy.

A father tells that every year his family saved money to have the bathroom done

over. They lived in a house with an old-fashioned bathroom—legs on the tub, that sort of thing. But every winter they would take the money out of the bank and go on a couple of family skiing trips. The father reports that the oldest boy, when he went away from home, always mentioned in his letters what a great time he had on those skiing trips. The father says, "I can't imagine his writing home, 'Boy, we really have a swell bathroom, haven't we?'" (Marion D. Hanks, Conference Report, April 1968, 57).

Play ball together as a family. Take walks. Take hikes. Eat banana splits. Rake leaves. Have races in the backyard. Find ways to laugh more often and enjoy one another. Elder Marvin J. Ashton told the story about a father who said to his young son, "I love you." Unimpressed by the verbiage, the boy replied, "I don't want you to love me. I want you to play football with me" (*Ensign*, November 1975, 108). Time spent with others makes a tremendous difference in our influence on them. We must spend time with them. It is the most significant way we prove, "I love you."

The Lord counseled Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and David Whitmer, "Behold, I say unto you that you shall let your time be devoted to the studying of the scriptures, and to preaching. . . . and to performing your labors on the land" (D&C 26:1). Sisters, let our time be devoted as well. Let it be devoted to loving our family members, serving them, teaching them, and performing our labors as wives and mothers, aunts and sisters. Let us take time to stay close to our family garden. Let us examine it every day, even when it isn't convenient. Let us look for signs of possible problems and correct them in time so that they won't be overwhelming.

My oldest child, a daughter, married just three weeks before her husband started medical school. Thirteen years later, he finished his medical training. In those long years of hard work, there were some deficiencies in their life. One was the amount of time they as a family had with Dad. Soon after my son-in-law began his work as a neuroradiologist, he was asked to lecture to an auditorium full of doctors at a noon seminar. It happened to fall on a much-needed day off. In response to the request, this father said, "I have promised my four-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, that I will spend the day with her. If I can bring her to the lecture, I will do it." The agreement was made; Mom fixed a lunch for Elizabeth to eat while Dad spoke. With Dad at the podium, Elizabeth sat on the front row between a couple of doctors and ate her lunch. As Dad left the podium to return to his seat at the conclusion of his presentation, Elizabeth exclaimed in a voice that could be heard on the back row, "Good job, Dad!" The audience exploded in laughter.

I'm thankful for devoted children who take time to bless the lives of my grandchildren by their timeless and time-filled parenting.

In 1994 as my birthday was approaching, I told my children that I did not want them to buy me a gift for my birthday. Instead, I asked if they would take the time to write me a letter. The letter could contain anything they wanted to say. I don't need to tell you that those letters are a priceless treasure to me now. I can't imagine any gift purchased at any store at any price that would be of such value as these letters are to me. Most of the comments are too sacred to share. But the letter from my daughter Suzanne contained an

illustration that I particularly enjoyed. She thanked me for being her defender and support, and then she said this: "I am reminded of a day I went to lunch with a group of friends at the park a few years ago. A young duck was having a hard time getting the bread we tossed to him because a loud obnoxious seagull kept swooping down and snatching it before the duck caught it. Suddenly, from at least fifty yards away, the mother duck came cruising down the grass hill above the pond at a velocity exceeding sixty miles per hour. She pounced on that seagull with such force that he skipped across the top of the water like a small stone and flew away squawking like a scared bully, pursued at close range by that angry mother duck. We all cheered for her, and someone yelled: 'I am woman, hear me roar!' There have been many times when I've witnessed your love for all of us and thought of that duck. It's awesome."

What is really awesome is that the mothering and nurturing instinct is also part of our Heavenly Father's plan. We as women are blessed to be an integral part of our Heavenly Father's family design. I am thankful for a devoted mother who took time to defend me and teach me and love me. I'm thankful for all of you devoted mothers and women who take time to do the much-needed nurturing of families.

There is nothing better you could do with your time for heaven's sake. It may be sticky and it may be messy, but in those cold January days, when your children and other family members exhibit the fruits of your labors, when the ripeness of your teachings and love is sweet to the taste, no matter how messy or sticky it has been, you will be glad you canned those peaches. And you will know the answer to Elder Maxwell's question, because, sisters, what happens in cradles and kitchens far surpasses and even changes what happens in congresses.

God, our Heavenly Father, wants you to return home to Him. He wants you to bring all your family members with you, ripe and full of gospel knowledge and good works, and blossoming with a happy heart. I know He will bless you if you will take the time, because with families—it's about time.