

“The Family—How Firm a Foundation”

Margaret D. Nadauld

Young Women General President

© 2002 Margaret D. Nadauld. All rights reserved.

It’s so wonderful to be here with you today, sisters. I wish you could all sit up here and see how beautiful you are. I, in my walking around today, ran into a man—a husband, actually, who looked rather lost—who said, “My wife is in there, and if you see Andrea, tell her that I made the taquitos for our son’s elementary school banquet today. And tell her I love her, and I really miss her.” So Andrea, wherever you are, that’s the message.

I love the wonderful hymn we often sing: “How firm a foundation, ye Saints of the Lord, / Is laid for your faith in his excellent word!” I wonder if that is the song the pioneer workers sang as they tore up the weakening first foundation they had laid for the Salt Lake Temple. Can you remember reading about when that happened? And they replaced it with firm, solid granite which would be enduring in strength and stand the test of time. With such determination to do it right and dedication to excellence, no wonder this magnificent structure took forty years to build.

You and I are today laying foundations which will outlast anything earthly, for we are building families—families dedicated to the work of God. We are building families which are the foundation of society and the foundation of the Church, families which will be enduring in strength and must withstand the tests of our time.

When considered in those terms, the task seems too monumental, too imposing, too grand for mere mortal women to tackle. But you are just the ones to do it! And I am so grateful for the honor of standing with you in these latter days to put our collective hearts and minds and very lives to the attention of this holy endeavor.

I remember trying to do that with our young family. I got up early in the mornings to begin the awesome task. One day I recorded in my journal about how it went: “Got up early. Made German pancakes and hot oatmeal and juice. Practicing violin with James when a baby threw and shattered a glass. Cleaned it up and disciplined him. Fed the boys. Practiced piano with Lincoln while a little one wet on the kitchen floor”—I didn’t know if I should say that or not, but I thought you’d understand—“and another emptied corn flakes on the bedroom floor. All the while Taylor was running wild throughout the house. Sent to his room. Two phone calls—one to go visiting teaching and the other to borrow the boys’ snow clothes. All this before 8 A.M. A typical day’s beginning.” At the end of the day I recorded in the

journal this question, “Have I loved our children enough today?”

Occasionally it was like the wild, wild west in those frontier days, those foundation-building days of our family. Life was sometimes hectic as we tried to tame and civilize our little ones. With the perspective of years, it appears that the only thing there was to do was to just keep after it, every day. One day you may wake up, sisters, and see that you have high school graduates, missionaries, temple-married children who pay their tithing and serve others. And you may say, “When did such a thing happen?”

The teaching that mothers do takes great patience. It takes a sense of humor and love. And it takes consistent, never-ending effort to build a foundation that is steady and firm. Every time a child kneels at a mother’s knee to pray, the child is taught. When going to church is a pleasant event in the week for the family, a child is taught. When a prayer is said and the mother gently helps the child keep arms folded, a child is taught. When classroom teachings are discussed at home, a child is taught—twice. When home teachers are welcomed with appreciation, a child is taught. When tithing is paid first and regarded as important, a child is taught. When parents love the Lord and find joy in living His teachings, a child is taught. When a parent repents and asks forgiveness of a child, a child is taught—and then forgives and forgets. When a parent honors marital vows with complete fidelity, a child is taught—and feels safe. When scriptures are part of teaching in the home, a child is taught—by the Spirit as well as by the word. When a parent is seen reading for enjoyment and information, a child is taught. When parents read to a child, a child is taught—and feels loved.

Teaching in a family is not just mother to child. There is so much to be learned from each other and extended family. Family time together is worth sacrificing for. I recently read a newspaper article describing a family night in a community in New Jersey. It said that when “this commuter village 20 miles from New York decided [that their] jam-packed schedules left no time for families, the calendars came out. It took seven months of planning, but on Tuesday, the upscale community of stately homes and gilt-lettered shops will take a collective night off.”²

Other communities are doing the same thing. They are coming to understand what a prophet of God foresaw nearly forty years ago when he called upon members of the Church to hold weekly family home evenings. Children and parents need each other. They need planned teaching moments certainly, and they also need just plain old time—time where you work together, play together, laugh together—your time!

Journalist Dick Feagler suggests that “the trouble with [the quality time] notion is that being a [child] is not a profession. [Children] are not colleagues. . . . They lack the brisk efficiency to schedule quality time seminars with their parents.

“What [children] do is hang out. And while they’re hanging out, they want to know a parent is available.”³

Setting aside a weekly family night is a wonderful beginning. I would say that is a minimal requirement for building a strong family foundation. I don’t understand how you can build a

firm, strong family foundation on one night a week. For many families the daily mealtime is a must.

Kitchens are an important place for teaching and adding building blocks to a family foundation. Mothers have no idea of the effect of their daily kitchen consistencies in nurturing their children. What is so nice about mealtime is that food and prayers go together like salt and pepper or bread and butter. Whenever we got to eat breakfast at my grandparents' home, I noticed that Grandma, who reared a large family, set the breakfast table the night before with the chairs turned away from the table. In the morning, before eating, we first knelt at our chairs to offer family prayer. "A generation or two ago," said President Gordon B. Hinckley, "family prayer in the homes of Christian people throughout the world was as much a part of the day's activity as were the meals. As that practice has diminished, our moral decay has ensued. I fear that as the quality of our housing has improved, the spirit of our homes has deteriorated." 4

Isn't it ironic that in a day when the threats of evil in our society are so rampant we are abandoning the very things that could strengthen and fortify us against evil?

One woman said, "Six o'clock was a special hour in our family. Even though the children were outside playing, or working out with teams, or had jobs, or were in student government, everyone knew that at six o'clock there would be dinner waiting—table set, food ready. Those who were late without excuse got to do all the dishes. Otherwise everyone pitched in and we could slick up the kitchen in short order, and it was almost fun. Of course there were exceptions, but usually we all gathered at supper time to pray, share experiences of the day, tell the latest joke, coordinate schedules, discuss sports and current events, and on Sundays we discussed the message of the lessons and the speakers at church."5 For many successful families, mealtime is an ideal time to teach and add to the firm foundation of family.

I would like to say a few words about fathers to this audience of women. The stripling warriors who were so famous for following the faith of their mothers were also blessed by their fathers. Alma also tells of the fathers providing for their children (Alma 56:27). These warriors couldn't have been as successful without the provisions brought by faithful fathers. Sisters, do we show appreciation for all fathers do in foundation building?

Recently my wonderful father passed away. He was the beloved patriarch of our family and of our stake. He had spent his lifetime in the service of his family and others. And in reflecting on the life and goodness of this noble man, I remembered some of the Christmases we had had as children. As I was growing up, my father worked hard and provided well for our family, and every year Christmas morning was the same for us. We got up early—too early—and awakened our parents. We all joined together in the living room as we opened our gifts with unbridled enthusiasm, throwing the wrappings around, exclaiming with delight our joy in all that we had received and then busily (and I must say in retrospect, selfishly) set about playing with and enjoying the abundance our parents had provided. Daddy slipped quietly out and went to the hatchery to do the work which had to be done. Thousands of eggs in incubators, in process of hatching into thousands of baby

chicks, had to be carefully attended to and the parent stock fed and cared for. Daddy's employees had Christmas day off to be with their families, but chickens never have a day off. The work still had to be done, and so our good-hearted father did it. In our youthful lack of understanding and appreciation, we were disappointed to have him leave so soon. Didn't he care about us? Did he love to work more than he loved to be with us?

And then one day I understood, and I felt ashamed. Daddy loved us more than anything, and that's why he worked so hard to provide for us without ever one word of complaint. I wonder if he ever felt unappreciated or unloved by his thoughtless daughter. We eventually outgrew and overcame that kind of behavior with the help of our wise mother.

The family proclamation teaches that fathers "are responsible to provide the necessities of life . . . for their families." ⁶Wives can show gratitude for all that their husbands do to provide for the family. They can express this gratitude within the hearing of their children. When you go out for a hamburger with the family, do you make a point of saying thank you to your husband for doing dinner and dishes that night as he empties the fast food trays into the trash?

When you kneel in prayer as a couple and as a family, do you thank Heavenly Father for a husband who works hard? By their example, wise women teach their children to be grateful for all their fathers do. The husband loves coming home because there he will find peace, refreshment, relief from the pressures of the world. He will find appreciation at home, and there he will be loved.

You can help enhance the relationship between the children and their father. Daddies are so important to daughters in the establishment of their self-esteem. Find ways to help fathers and children keep a close and happy relationship, sisters.

In a newspaper account of the most outstanding girls basketball player in the state, the young woman told a reporter, "[My dad's] been my coach my whole life,' she said. 'He trains with me, he runs with me, he shoots with me. He helps me set my goals, and he's just always been there for me. He always wants the best for me.'" ⁷

One young man named James wrote, "Growing up, every Saturday morning was the same: my father wouldn't say anything, he would simply tap on our bedroom doors and then go outside, and within ten minutes his groggy sons from teenager to toddler would be at his side in our back yard. If there were, in fact, no pressing chores to be done, we would simply move dirt. It was Saturday morning, and we were working, and that's what mattered to him. Eventually he would stop and wipe his brow, and with a broad smile declare, 'It's a fine day for water skiing.' And after a couple of hours of dragging us around the lake in an old boat we shared with another family, he'd stop in the middle of the water for lunch. And then, as we were all sitting there, his captive audience with a bologna sandwich in one hand and a soda in the other, my father would teach us. He taught us the value of hard work and priorities in the context of a well-balanced life. At the time I didn't know it—I was just enjoying my bologna sandwich— but it was during these moments that I learned many of

the values I hold dear today.”

Mothers, encourage the involvement of fathers in the lives of your children and in the establishment of firm family foundations.

Wise mothers have some vision of what they want their family to become. Teach your children about your vision for the family. When they were apartment dwellers, a young couple would occasionally take Sunday drives through lovely neighborhoods with fine, large homes, and the wife remembers thinking, If we could see the spiritual stature of that home out on the front lawn, would it tower over the house or barely fill one little corner of the lot? And then the time came when this young couple with five growing children took on the project of building a home of their own. As the work progressed, the home began to look larger than they had imagined and had the potential of seeming too wonderful, and the wife worried about where they were placing their values as more and more resources and more and more time were being consumed by this project. And finally one day she gathered her growing flock around her and said, “It would be sad if people drove by our house and said, ‘Oh, look at that beautiful home.’ What I would hope is that people would drive by and say, ‘Oh, the nicest family of outstanding children live in that home.’ This is the home where I want our children to come for love and security—a house wherein they learn the lessons of life and practice living the gospel.” She was describing the blueprint of a house of God as outlined in the Doctrine and Covenants 88: “Establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God” (D&C 88:119).

A vision of what your family can become and what that will require from you is a must in establishing a firm foundation to build upon.

Sometimes the vision has to be altered because part of your dream has been destroyed. Don’t let a tragic happening destroy your foundation—it may feel shaky for a while, even a very long while sometimes, but if your faith is built upon solid ground of gospel teachings, upon the rock of Christ, you can eventually steady this family once again, sisters. Look for ways to shore up the footings of faith—faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the foundation upon which our life must be built. It is He who implemented the Father’s plan, and it is this plan you voted for. It is the great plan of happiness, a plan for success in meeting life’s trials. Alma teaches this: “And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people. And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:11–12). Our beloved Savior provides succor for sickness, disappointment, tragedy, adversity. He will carry those burdens for you. Ask for His help. He will help you. It is His work and His glory to bring to pass the immortality and the eternal life of all mankind (Moses 1:39). It is His mission to help you be successful in things of eternal worth. Seek His divine help. Turn to Him for rest from carrying your heavy burdens. Let faith in Him be the

basis for your family foundation.

Sisters, always remember that the greatest work you will ever do will be within the walls of your own home⁸, as President Harold B. Lee taught. This means the greatest service you will ever give, the greatest lessons you will ever teach, the greatest leadership you will ever know, the greatest music you will ever make will be those that strengthen the foundation of your home and bring your loved ones closer to the Savior.

Like the temple's firm foundation, once the family foundation is firmed up and the strength of the family is established, it can be there for eternity. It can endure forever. Such is our faith. Even when you have a child who does not accept your teachings or your examples. The sweet teaching of the Prophet Joseph Smith—and he never taught a more comforting doctrine—he said “the eternal sealing of faithful parents and the divine promises made to them for valiant service in the Cause of Truth would save not only themselves, but likewise their posterity. Though some of the sheep may wander, the eye of the Shepherd is upon them, and sooner or later they will feel the tentacles of Divine Providence reaching out after them and drawing them back to the fold.”⁹

This is our hope. This is our promise. It is worth our very best effort. It is worth our constant, enduring effort.

“How firm a foundation, ye Saints of the Lord, / Is laid for your faith in [t]his excellent word!”¹⁰ May this be the song of our hearts as we work with our Father in Heaven to build a firm, faithful foundation for our families. God will guide our hands and our minds as we build and strengthen our home and our family. In this I have complete faith, and I testify of His goodness to His children as the master architect and the rock upon which we must build a firm foundation, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

¹ Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 85.

² Sheila Hotchkin, “New Jersey City Sets aside a Family Night,” Deseret News, 25 March 2002.

³ Dick Feagler, “Time Spent with Kids Is Truly Quality Time,” SouthCoast Today, 3 June 1997.

⁴ Gordon B. Hinckley, Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 213–14.

⁵ Correspondence, Young Women historical files.

⁶ “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Ensign, November 1995, 102.

⁷ Amy Donaldson, “Seljaas Is 2002 Ms. Basketball,” Deseret News, 12 March 2002.

[8](#) Harold B. Lee, Conference Report, April 1973, 130; or Ensign, July 1973, 98.

[9](#) Quoted by Orson F. Whitney, Conference Report, April 1929, 110.

[10](#) Hymns, no. 85.

Back to [Women's Conference Transcripts](#)