

For young parents, attending the temple may be a once-a-month date. President Packer has said: "Perhaps you will understand . . . we are trying to establish family history as . . . a 'cottage industry.' . . . Couples raising little children should not feel inadequate or guilty . . . if they cannot afford the time or money to attend a distant temple frequently. Mother makes a contribution by noting important events, collecting pictures, bits of memorabilia, . . . all as it fits into the schedule of a busy mother" ("A Plea to Stake Presidents," leadership training meeting, 1 Apr. 1988, 5).

### **Emphasize the temple**

My own mother didn't do scrapbooks, but she gave me a love for my heritage. She told me story after story about my ancestors as she taught me to love them.

President Packer continues: "Father and mother can speak of ordinances and

covenants. By the inflection of their voices, they can italicize the word 'temple' every time they say it. . . . In proper season, family obligations will be a bit less and income a bit more. Then members can and should give more to this sacred [temple] work" ("A Plea to Stake Presidents," 5).

We plead with you mothers and fathers to teach your sons and daughters the meaning of the temple covenants. Teach them that "wearing the garment is [a] sacred privilege. . . . [It] is an outward expression of an inner commitment to follow the Savior Jesus Christ" (First Presidency letter, 5 Nov. 1996, 2).

Brothers and sisters, as servants of the living God, we shall press forward in this sacred temple work. May we teach our children that as they spiritually prepare themselves for the temple, they may stand in the presence of the Lord, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## **Elder Jeffrey R. Holland**

### **Gratitude to God the Father**

On this Easter weekend I wish to thank not only the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ but also His true Father, our spiritual Father and God, who, by accepting the sacrifice of His firstborn, perfect Son, blessed all of His children in those hours of atonement and redemption. Never more than at Easter time is there so much meaning in that declaration from the book of John which praises the Father as well as the Son: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."<sup>1</sup>

I am a father, inadequate to be sure, but I cannot comprehend the burden it must have been for God in His heaven to

witness the deep suffering and Crucifixion of His Beloved Son in such a manner. His every impulse and instinct must have been to stop it, to send angels to intervene—but He did not intervene. He endured what He saw because it was the only way that a saving, vicarious payment could be made for the sins of all His other children, from Adam and Eve to the end of the world. I am eternally grateful for a perfect Father and His perfect Son, neither of whom shrank from the bitter cup nor forsook the rest of us who are imperfect, who fall short and stumble, who too often miss the mark.

### **Jesus' relationship with His Father**

In considering such beauty of the "at-one-ment" in that first Easter season,

we are reminded that this relationship between Christ and His Father is one of the sweetest and most moving themes running through the Savior's ministry. Jesus' entire being, His complete purpose and delight, were centered in pleasing His Father and obeying His will. Of Him He seemed always to be thinking; to Him He seemed always to be praying. Unlike us, He needed no crisis, no discouraging shift in events to direct His hopes heavenward. He was already instinctively, longingly looking that way.

In all His mortal ministry Christ seems never to have had a single moment of vanity or self-interest. When one young man tried to call Him "good," He deflected the compliment, saying only one was deserving of such praise—His Father.

In the early days of His ministry He said humbly, "I can of mine own self do nothing: . . . I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me."<sup>2</sup>

Following His teachings, which stunned the audience with their power and authority, He would say: "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. . . . I am not come of myself, but he that sent me is true."<sup>3</sup> Later He would say again, "I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak."<sup>4</sup>

To those who wanted to see the Father, to hear from God directly that Jesus was what He said He was, He answered: "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also. . . . He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."<sup>5</sup> When Jesus wanted to preserve unity among His disciples, He prayed using the example of His own relationship with God: "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are [one]."<sup>6</sup>

Even as He moved toward the Crucifixion, He restrained His Apostles who

would have intervened, by saying, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"<sup>7</sup> When that unspeakable ordeal was finished, He uttered what must have been the most peaceful and deserved words of His mortal ministry. At the end of His agony, He whispered, "It is finished. . . . Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."<sup>8</sup> Finally it was over. Finally He could go home.

I confess that I have reflected at length upon that moment and the Resurrection, which was shortly to follow it. I have wondered what that reunion must have been like: the Father that loved this Son so much, the Son that honored and revered His Father in every word and deed. For two who were one as these two were one, what must that embrace have been like? What must that divine companionship be yet? We can only wonder and admire. And we can, on an Easter weekend, yearn to live worthily of some portion of that relationship ourselves.

### **Strengthen relationships with children**

As a father, I wonder if I and all other fathers could do more to build a sweeter, stronger relationship with our sons and daughters here on earth. Dads, is it too bold to hope that our children might have some small portion of the feeling for us that the Divine Son felt for His Father? Might we earn more of that love by trying to be more of what God was to His child? In any case, we do know that a young person's developing concept of God centers on characteristics observed in that child's earthly parents.<sup>9</sup>

### **Absence of fathers damages children**

For that reason and many others, I suppose no book I have read in recent months has alarmed me more than a work entitled *Fatherless America*. In this study the author speaks of "fatherless-

ness" as "the most harmful demographic trend of this generation," the leading cause of damage to children. It is, he is convinced, the engine driving our most urgent social problems, from poverty to crime to adolescent pregnancy to child abuse to domestic violence. Among the principal social issues of our time is the flight of fathers from their children's lives.<sup>10</sup>

Of even greater concern than the physical absenteeism of some fathers is the spiritually or emotionally absent father. These are fatherly sins of omission that are probably more destructive than sins of commission. Why are we not surprised that when 2,000 children of all ages and backgrounds were asked what they appreciated most about their fathers, they answered universally, "He spends time with me"?<sup>11</sup>

A young Laurel I met on a conference assignment not long ago wrote to me after our visit and said, "I wish my dad knew how much I need him spiritually and emotionally. I crave any kind comment, any warm personal gesture. I don't think he knows how much it would mean to me to have him take an active interest in what is going on in my life, to offer to give me a blessing, or just spend some time together. I know he worries that he won't do the right thing or won't say the words well. But just to have him try would mean more than he could ever know. I don't want to sound ungrateful because I know he loves me. He sent me a note once and signed it 'Love, Dad.' I treasure that note. I hold it among my dearest possessions."<sup>12</sup>

### Most fathers are wonderful

Well, as with that young woman, I don't want this talk to sound ungrateful, nor is it meant to make fathers feel they have fallen short. Most fathers are wonderful. Most dads are terrific. I don't know who wrote these little storybook

verses remembered from my youth, but they go something like this:

Only a dad with a tired face,  
Coming home from the daily race, . . .  
Toiling and striving from day to day,  
Facing whatever may come his way,

. . .  
Glad in his heart that his own rejoice  
To see him come home and to hear  
his voice. . . .

Only a dad, but he gives his all,  
[Smoothing] the way for his children  
small,

Doing with courage [so] stern and  
grim

The deeds that his father did for him.  
These are the lines that for him I pen:  
Only a dad, but the best of men.<sup>13</sup>

### Follow God's example of fatherhood

And, brethren, even when we are not "the best of men," even in our limitations and inadequacy, we can keep making our way in the right direction because of the encouraging teachings set forth by a Divine Father and demonstrated by a Divine Son. With a Heavenly Father's help we can leave more of a parental legacy than we suppose.

One new father wrote: "Often as I watch my son watch me, I am taken back to moments with my own dad, remembering how vividly I wanted to be just like him. I remember having a plastic razor and my own can of foaming cream, and each morning I would shave when he shaved. I remember following his footsteps back and forth across the grass as he mowed the lawn in summer.

"Now I want my son to follow my lead, and yet it terrifies me to know he probably will. Holding this little boy in my arms, I feel a 'heavenly homesickness,' a longing to love the way God loves, to comfort the way He comforts, to protect the way He protects. The answer to all the fears of my youth was always

‘What would Dad do?’ Now that I have a child to raise I am counting on a Heavenly Father to tell me exactly that.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Influence of a father’s love**

A friend from college days wrote to me recently, saying: “Much in my chaotic childhood was uncertain, but one thing I knew for sure: that my dad loved me. That certainty was the anchor of my young life. I came to know and love the Lord because my father loved him. I have never called anyone a fool or taken the Lord’s name in vain because he told me the Bible said I shouldn’t. I have always paid my tithing because he taught me it was a privilege to do so. I have always tried to take responsibility for my mistakes because my father did. Even though he was estranged from the Church for a [time], at the end of his life he served a mission and worked faithfully in the temple. In his will he said that any money left over from taking care of his [family] should go to the Church. He loved the Church with all of his heart. And because of him, so do I.”<sup>15</sup>

Surely that must be the spiritual application of Lord Byron’s couplet: “Yet in my lineaments they trace / Some features of my father’s face.”<sup>16</sup>

### **Scriptural examples of a father’s impact**

At a vulnerable moment in young Nephi’s life, his prophetic future was determined when he said, “I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father.”<sup>17</sup> At the turning point of the prophet Enos’s life, he said it was “the words which I had often heard my father speak”<sup>18</sup> which prompted one of the great revelations recorded in the Book of Mormon. And sorrowing Alma the Younger, when confronted by the excruciating memory of his sins, “remembered also to have heard [his] father prophesy . . . concerning the coming of . . . Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for

the sins of the world.”<sup>19</sup> That brief memory, that personal testimony offered by his father at a time when the father may have felt nothing was sinking in, not only saved the spiritual life of this, his son, but changed forever the history of the Book of Mormon people.

Of Abraham, the grand patriarch, God said, “*I know him. . . . He will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord.*”<sup>20</sup>

I bear my witness this Easter weekend that “great things [will] be required at the hand[s] of [the] fathers,” as the Lord declared to the Prophet Joseph Smith.<sup>21</sup> Surely the greatest of those things will be to have done all they could for the happiness and spiritual safety of the children they are to nurture.

In that most burdensome moment of all human history, with blood appearing at every pore and an anguished cry upon His lips, Christ sought Him whom He had always sought—His Father. “Abba,” He cried, “Papa,” or from the lips of a younger child, “Daddy.”<sup>22</sup>

This is such a personal moment it almost seems a sacrilege to cite it. A Son in unrelieved pain, a Father His only true source of strength, both of them staying the course, making it through the night—together.

Fathers, this Easter weekend may we be renewed in our task as parents, bolstered by images of this Father and this Son as we embrace our children and stand with them forever, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### **NOTES**

1. John 3:16.
2. John 5:30.
3. John 7:16, 28.
4. John 12:49.
5. John 14:7, 9.
6. John 17:11.
7. John 18:11.
8. John 19:30; Luke 23:46.

9. See "Parent-Child Relationships and Children's Images of God," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Mar. 1997, 25-43.
10. David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem* (1995), 1.
11. See "Becoming a Better Father," *Ensign*, Jan. 1983, 27.
12. Personal correspondence.
13. Edgar A. Guest, "Only a Dad," in *Best-Loved Poems of the LDS People*, ed. Jack M. Lyon and others (1996), 90-91.
14. Personal correspondence.
15. Personal correspondence from Robert A. Rees.
16. *Parisina*, stanza 13, lines 285-86.
17. 1 Nephi 2:16.
18. Enos 1:3.
19. Alma 36:17.
20. Genesis 18:19; italics added.
21. Doctrine and Covenants 29:48.
22. Mark 14:36.

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The chorus sang "The Lord Is My Shepherd."

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### President Hinckley

Sister Carol Thomas of the Young Women presidency and Elder Jeffrey Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve have spoken to us, with the chorus singing "The Lord Is My Shepherd."

We are grateful to the Bonneville International LDS Radio Network and the owners and operators of many television and radio stations and cable systems for offering their facilities as a public service in carrying this conference to the world.

We express deep appreciation to the Mormon Youth Chorus for the beautiful music they have given and to Brother Bowden particularly for what may be his final presentation in this capacity. He has done a tremendous work, and we are so deeply grateful to him.

President James E. Faust, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, will be our next speaker and final speaker, following which the choir will sing "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today." The benediction will be given by Elder Carl B. Pratt of the Seventy, following which the conference will be adjourned until 2:00 this afternoon.

## President James E. Faust

My dear brothers, sisters, and friends, I earnestly seek the influence of the Spirit during the few moments that I stand at this pulpit. I pray for guidance and wisdom so that what I say may be acceptable to our Heavenly Father.

### People have looked to our day

Brethren and sisters, ours is the time of which the Prophet Joseph Smith spoke, "upon which prophets, priests and kings [in ages past] have dwelt with peculiar delight; [and] have looked forward with joyful anticipation to the day in which we live; and fired with heavenly and joyful

anticipations they have sung and written and prophesied of this our day; . . . we are the favored people that God has [chosen] to bring about the Latter-day glory."<sup>1</sup> Since the Prophet Joseph said this in 1842, men have acquired more knowledge than in all of the time before his ministry.

### The two greatest historical events

We stand on the brink of the next century. From this vantage point, we need to remember that the most significant events in the last 2,000 years were not the marvels of science, technology,