

that are most vital to us? I suggest that we may look at the source of the messages and the motivation behind them. The Lord has given us a guide through the prophet Alma: “Whatsoever is good cometh from God, and whatsoever is evil cometh from the devil.”²¹ We must strive to be worthy so that we do not miss the profound messages that come from God. Ultimately these messages include the sum total of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Heeding messages from living prophets

It has been my great privilege to have met and had some acquaintance with more than half of the Presidents of the Church since the Prophet Joseph. I met President Heber J. Grant when I was a priest in the Aaronic Priesthood. I felt a love for him, as I have for all of the Presidents since. I have wanted to live in harmony with their counsel.

In the nine years that President Thomas S. Monson and I have served as counselors to President Gordon B. Hinckley, I have come to know and feel absolutely and unequivocally that President Hinckley is the inspired President and prophet for our time. I testify that he has known and received and will continue to

receive the mind and will of the Lord for this people and the whole world. We should always be looking for and heeding the prophetic messages that come from the current President of the Church. That we may do so, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. See Buck Private McCollum, *History and Rhymes of the Lost Battalion* (1939).
2. Exodus 3:2.
3. See Exodus 3:3.
4. Exodus 3:4.
5. Exodus 3:5.
6. Exodus 3:8.
7. 1 Kings 19:11–12.
8. See Jonah 1–3.
9. Ether 3:5.
10. 3 Nephi 2:1.
11. Enos 1:10.
12. Doctrine and Covenants 8:2.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 85:6.
14. See 1 Nephi 17:45.
15. Exodus 20:12.
16. Doctrine and Covenants 59:9.
17. Doctrine and Covenants 121:34–35.
18. Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 6:38; see also Matthew 6:33.
19. Proverbs 22:7.
20. Doctrine and Covenants 19:35.
21. Alma 5:40.

Elder L. Tom Perry

Satan’s efforts centered on fathers

As we take a long, hard look at the world today, it is becoming increasingly evident that Satan is working overtime to enslave the souls of men. His main target is the fundamental unit of society—the family.

During the past few decades, Satan has waged a vigorous campaign to belittle and demean this basic and most important of all organizations. His success is becoming increasingly evident—the grim facts are

seen, reported, and heard about daily and involve the collapse of many family units. With the decay of the family, we see the terrible effects on our society—increased crime, behavior disorders, poverty, drug abuse, and the list continues to grow and grow.

It appears to me that the crosshairs of Satan’s scope are centered on husbands and fathers. Today’s media, for example, have been relentless in their attacks—ridiculing and demeaning husbands and fathers in their God-given roles.

Portrayals of fathers in the scriptures

It may be useful to counter the portrayal of husbands and fathers in the media with the scriptures. There we have so many great role models.

The Father and the Savior. In the New Testament we have a glimpse of the Savior's relationship with the Father. One of the most vivid of these glimpses is in the garden just before His betrayal:

"[Jesus] kneeled down, and prayed,

"Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.

"And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him."¹

Moses and Jethro. We have the example in Exodus of Jethro, Moses's father-in-law, observing how he was governing the children of Israel:

"And when Moses' father in law saw all that he did to the people, he said, What is this thing that thou doest to the people? why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even?

"And Moses said unto his father in law, Because the people come unto me to enquire of God: . . .

"And Moses' father in law said unto him, The thing that thou doest is not good.

"Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone."²

Then Jethro taught Moses how to delegate this responsibility by calling able men who would fear God and letting them judge as rulers in Israel:

"And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee."³

Alma. In the Book of Mormon we have the account of Alma, the son of Alma, being numbered among the rebellious and

doing all manner of iniquity. Alma the father prayed with much faith that his son would come to a knowledge of the truth—a prayer which was answered in a very special way:

"And now it came to pass that while he was going about to destroy the church of God, . . . the angel of the Lord appeared unto them; and he descended as it were in a cloud; and he spake as it were with a voice of thunder . . . ;

"And so great was their astonishment, that they fell to the earth, and understood not the words which he spake unto them.

"Nevertheless he cried again, saying: Alma, arise and stand forth, for why persecutest thou the church of God? For the Lord hath said: This is my church, and I will establish it; and nothing shall overthrow it, save it is the transgression of my people.

"And again, the angel said: Behold, the Lord hath heard the prayers of his people, and also the prayers of his servant, Alma, who is thy father; for he has prayed with much faith concerning thee that thou mightest be brought to the knowledge of the truth; therefore, for this purpose have I come to convince thee of the power and authority of God, that the prayers of his servants might be answered according to their faith."⁴

When Alma the Younger recovered from this experience, he was a changed man.

Alternate family formations will not work

Satan, in his carefully devised plan to destroy the family, seeks to diminish the role of fathers. Increased youth violence, youth crime, greater poverty and economic insecurity, and the failure of increasing numbers of children in our schools offer clear evidence of lack of a positive influence of fathers in the homes.⁵ A family needs a father to anchor it.

Surely we have learned by now, from the experience over centuries, that the

basic family provides the most stable and secure foundation for society and is fundamental to the preparation of young people for their future responsibilities. We should have learned by now that alternate styles of family formations have not worked and never will work. This was stated plainly by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World”:

“We, the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children.

“All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual pre-mortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose. . . .

“The first commandment that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God’s commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. We further declare that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed *only* between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife. . . .

“. . . By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners. . . .

“We warn that individuals who violate covenants of chastity, who abuse spouse or

offspring, or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God. Further, we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.”⁶

Roles of fathers

Given such urgent warnings about the future of our Father in Heaven’s children, fathers and mothers must search their souls to be certain they are following the Lord’s direction in building up eternal families. Focusing on fathers, what does the Lord expect us to do?

Once a family has been established, the father’s roles include the following:

1. The father is the head in his family.

“Fatherhood is leadership, the most important kind of leadership. It has always been so; it always will be so. Father, with the assistance and counsel and encouragement of your eternal companion, you preside in the home. It is not a matter of whether you are most worthy or best qualified, but it is a matter of [divine] appointment.”⁷

Your leadership in the home must include leading in family worship.

“You preside at the meal table, at family prayer. You preside at family home evening; and as guided by the Spirit of the Lord, you see that your children are taught correct principles. It is your place to give direction relating to all of family life.

“You give father’s blessings. You take an active part in establishing family rules and discipline. As a leader in your home you plan and sacrifice to achieve the blessing of a unified and happy family. To do all of this requires that you live a family-centered life.”⁸

As President Joseph F. Smith said: “Brethren, there is too little religious devotion, love, and fear of God, in the home; too much worldliness, selfishness, indiffer-

ence, and lack of reverence in the family, or it never would exist so abundantly on the outside. Then, the home is what needs reforming. Try today, and tomorrow, to make a change in your home.”⁹

Remember, brethren, that in your role as leader in the family, your wife is your companion. President Gordon B. Hinckley taught: “In this Church the man neither walks ahead of his wife nor behind his wife but at her side. They are coequals.”¹⁰ Since the beginning, God has instructed mankind that marriage should unite husband and wife together in unity.¹¹ Therefore, there is not a president or a vice president in a family. The couple works together eternally for the good of the family. They are united together in word, in deed, and in action as they lead, guide, and direct their family unit. They are on equal footing. They plan and organize the affairs of the family jointly and unanimously as they move forward.

2. *The father is a teacher.*

President Joseph F. Smith’s counsel applies today: “Do not let your children out to specialists . . . , but teach them by your own precept and example, by your own fireside. Be a specialist yourself in the truth.”¹²

“When you recognize the importance of teaching your children, you become humble, because at once you realize that this is accomplished by precept and example. You cannot be one thing and effectively teach another. You must live and study and pray for the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost. You must purify and organize your life so that your example and leadership reflect the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

“You must plan your day as guided by the Spirit of the Lord, earnestly seeking your own welfare and the welfare of your family before other cares blind you to these first responsibilities. As we have been taught by living prophets, ‘No other success in life can compensate for failure

in the home’ (David O. McKay, in Conference Report, Apr. 1964, 5; quoted from J. E. McCulloch, *Home: The Savior of Civilization* [1924], 42).”¹³

3. *The father is the temporal provider.*

President Ezra Taft Benson expressed it clearly: “The Lord has charged men with the responsibility to provide for their families in such a way that the wife is allowed to fulfill her role as mother in the home.” “Sometimes the mother works outside of the home at the encouragement, or even insistence, of her husband . . . [for the] convenience[s] that the extra income can buy. Not only will the family suffer in such instances, brethren, but your own spiritual growth and progression will be hampered.”¹⁴

Fathers, by divine decree, you are to preside over your family units. This is a sobering responsibility and the most important one you will ever assume, for it is an eternal responsibility. You place the family in its proper priority. It’s the part of your life that will endure beyond the grave. I testify that the following statement is true:

“The position which men occupy in the family, and especially those who hold the Melchizedek Priesthood, is one of first importance and should be clearly recognized and maintained in the order and with the authority which God conferred upon man in placing him at the head of his household.

“. . . There is no higher authority in matters relating to the family organization, and especially when that organization is presided over by one holding the higher priesthood, than that of the father. . . . The patriarchal order is of divine origin and will continue throughout time and eternity. There is then a particular reason why men, women, and children should understand this order and this authority in the households of the people of God, and seek to make it what God intended it to be, a qualification and preparation for the high-

est exaltation of His children. In the home the presiding authority is always vested in the father, and in all home affairs and family matters there is no other authority paramount.”¹⁵

Prophetic counsel about fathers

Now, I have used several quotes which I have not identified. I have done it for a purpose. They will be clearly noted in the *Ensign* and *Liahona* magazines in the coming May editions. I invite you to study them and review these conference messages. They are wonderful magazines and surely should be in every home. Then the spirit of this conference can live all year long in the pages of these magazines.

May we heed the voice of the prophets, who, from the beginning of time, have warned us about the importance of fathers in the home. May we determine more fully to fulfill our duties and responsibilities that the Lord has given to us as fathers in Zion is my humble prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Luke 22:41–43.
2. Exodus 18:14–15, 17–18.
3. Exodus 18:22.
4. Mosiah 27:10–14.
5. See David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem* (1995), introduction, 25–48; David Popenoe, *Life without Father* (1996), 52–78.
6. *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102; italics added.
7. The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, *Father, Consider Your Ways* (pamphlet, 1973); reprinted in *Ensign*, June 2002, 16.
8. *Ensign*, June 2002, 16.
9. “Worship in the Home,” *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1903, 138.
10. In Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 68; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 49.
11. See Genesis 2:24.
12. *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1903, 138.
13. *Ensign*, June 2002, 14.
14. In Conference Report, Oct. 1987, 61, 60–61; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1987, 49.
15. Joseph F. Smith, “The Rights of Fatherhood,” *Juvenile Instructor*, Mar. 1, 1902, 146.

Elder Dennis E. Simmons

“But if not . . .”

As a young man, I returned home from an eighth-grade basketball tournament dejected, disappointed, and confused. I blurted out to my mother, “I don’t know why we lost—I had faith we’d win!”

I now realize that I did not then know what faith is.

Faith is not bravado, not just a wish, not just a hope. True faith is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—confidence and trust in Jesus Christ that leads a person to follow Him.¹

Centuries ago, Daniel and his young associates were suddenly thrust from security into the world—a world foreign and intimidating. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down and

worship a golden image set up by the king, a furious Nebuchadnezzar told them that if they would not worship as commanded, they would immediately be cast into a burning, fiery furnace. “And who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?”²

The three young men quickly and confidently responded, “If it be so [if you cast us into the furnace], our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and *he will deliver us out of thine hand.*” That sounds like my eighth-grade kind of faith. But then they demonstrated that they fully understood what faith is. They continued, “*But if not, . . . we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.*”³ That is a statement of true faith.