

mandments” (John 14:15). Always strive to live worthy of the sacred, full blessings of the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. In our sorrow over the separation from our dear Nathan has come the peace that only the Savior and Redeemer can give. Our family has turned to Him one by one, and we now sing with greater appreciation and understanding:

Oh, it is wonderful that he should care  
for me  
Enough to die for me!  
Oh, it is wonderful, wonderful to me!  
[“I Stand All Amazed,” *Hymns*, no. 193]

My dear brothers and sisters, may you give to others and receive for yourselves every blessing the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ offers, I humbly pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## Elder Robert D. Hales

### Teach children to keep commandments

As Paul prophesied, we live in “perilous times.”<sup>1</sup> “Satan [has been going] about, leading away the hearts of the people,”<sup>2</sup> and his influence is increasing. But no matter how evil the world becomes, our families can be at peace. If we do what’s right, we will be guided and protected.

The hymn often sung by our pioneer ancestors tells us what to do: “Gird up your loins; fresh courage take. / Our God will never us forsake.”<sup>3</sup> That courage and faith is what we need as parents and families in these latter days.

Father Lehi had such courage. He loved his family and rejoiced that some of his children kept the Lord’s commandments. But he must have been heartbroken when his sons Laman and Lemuel “partook not of the fruit” representing the love of God. “He exceedingly feared for [them]; yea, he feared lest they should be cast off from the presence of the Lord.”<sup>4</sup>

Every parent faces moments of such fear. However, when we exercise our faith by teaching our children and doing what we can to help them, our fears will diminish. Lehi girded up his loins, and with faith “he did exhort [his children] with all the feeling of a tender parent, that they would hearken to his words, that perhaps the Lord would be merciful to them.” And “he

bade them to keep the commandments of the Lord.”<sup>5</sup>

### No family has reached perfection

We too must have the faith to teach our children and bid them to keep the commandments. We should not let their choices weaken our faith. Our worthiness will not be measured according to their righteousness. Lehi did not lose the blessing of feasting at the tree of life because Laman and Lemuel refused to partake of its fruit. Sometimes as parents we feel we have failed when our children make mistakes or stray. Parents are never failures when they do their best to love, teach, pray, and care for their children. Their faith, prayers, and efforts will be consecrated to the good of their children.

The Lord’s desire for us as parents is that we keep His commandments. He has said: “[Teach] your children light and truth, according to the commandments. . . . Set in order your own house. . . . See that [you] are more diligent and concerned at home.”<sup>6</sup>

I want to remind all of us today that no family has reached perfection. All families are subject to the conditions of mortality. All of us are given the gift of agency—to choose for ourselves and to learn from the consequences of our choices.

Any of us may experience a spouse, a child, a parent, or a member of our extended family suffering in one way or another—mentally, physically, emotionally, or spiritually—and we may experience these tribulations ourselves at times. In short, mortality is not easy.

### **The gospel protects families**

Each family has its own special circumstances. But the gospel of Jesus Christ addresses every challenge—which is why we must teach it to our children.

“The Family: A Proclamation to the World” states:

“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 and to be law-abiding citizens wherever they live. Husbands and wives—mothers and fathers—will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations.”<sup>7</sup>

Fulfilling these obligations is the key to protecting our families in these last days.

Moses counseled, “And thou shalt teach [these words] diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.”<sup>8</sup> Our families should be in our thoughts continually.

### **Example of Moses’s mother**

Moses understood the need for constant teaching, for he grew up in difficult times. At the time Moses was born, Pharaoh had declared that every Hebrew male infant in Egypt should be cast into the river. But Moses’s parents took seriously their parental duties.

The scriptures record, “By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, . . . and [his parents] were

not afraid of the king’s commandment.”<sup>9</sup> When Moses grew too old to be concealed, his mother, Jochebed, constructed an ingenious basket of bulrushes, waterproofed it with slime and pitch, and placed her son inside. She directed the tiny vessel down the river to a safe place—to where the Pharaoh’s daughter bathed.

Leaving nothing to chance, Jochebed also sent along an inspired helper, her daughter Miriam, to keep watch. When Pharaoh’s daughter, the princess, found the baby, Miriam bravely offered to call a Hebrew nurse. That nurse was Jochebed, Moses’s mother.<sup>10</sup> Because of her faithfulness, Moses’s life was spared. In time he learned who he really was, and he “forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king.”<sup>11</sup>

I join with faithful parents everywhere in declaring that we know who we are, we understand our responsibilities as parents, and we do not fear the wrath of the prince of darkness. We trust in the light of the Lord.

Like Jochebed, we raise our families in a wicked and hostile world—a world as dangerous as the courts of Egypt ruled by Pharaoh. But like Jochebed, we also weave around our children a protective basket—a vessel called “the family”—and guide them to safe places where our teachings can be reinforced in the home and at church.

Ultimately we guide them to the greatest of all houses of learning—the holy temple, where one day they can kneel, surrounded by their faithful family members, to be sealed for time and all eternity to a worthy companion. What they learned from us they will teach their children, and the work of eternal families will go on.

Along the way, at times when our children are away from us, the Lord provides inspired “Miriams” to watch over them—special third-party helpers such as priesthood and auxiliary leaders, teachers, extended family, and worthy friends.

Sometimes the Spirit prompts us as parents to seek special help beyond ourselves through such resources as doctors and qualified counselors. The Spirit will direct when and how such help should be obtained.

### Principles to strengthen families

But the greatest help for our families comes through the gospel—from our Heavenly Father, through the guidance of the Holy Ghost, in the doctrines and principles, and through the priesthood. May I share with you five important elements of parenting that will assist us in strengthening our families.

#### *Hold family councils*

*Hold family councils.* Sometimes we are afraid of our children—afraid to counsel with them for fear of offending them. There are priceless blessings to be obtained from counseling together with our families, showing a genuine interest in the lives of our family members. Occasionally family councils may involve all family members as part of a family home evening or other special gatherings. But we should regularly counsel with each of our children individually.

Without this one-on-one counseling together with our children, they are prone to believe that Dad and Mom, or Grandpa and Grandma, don't understand or care about the challenges they are facing. As we listen with love and refrain from interrupting, the Spirit will help us learn how we can be of help to our children and teach them.

For example, we may teach them that they can choose their actions but not the consequences of those actions. We can also gently help them understand what the consequences of *their* actions may be in their *own* lives.

#### *Leave the door to our hearts open*

Sometimes when our teachings aren't heeded and when our expectations are not met, we need to remind ourselves to *leave the door to our hearts open*.

In the parable of the prodigal son, we find a powerful lesson for families and especially parents. After the younger son "came to himself,"<sup>12</sup> he decided to go home.

How did he know his father wouldn't reject him? Because he knew his father. Through the inevitable misunderstandings, conflicts, and follies of the son's youth, I can visualize his father being there with an understanding and compassionate heart, a soft answer, a listening ear, and a forgiving embrace. I can also imagine his son knowing he could come home because he knew the kind of home that was awaiting him, for the scriptures say, "When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him."<sup>13</sup>

I testify that our Heavenly Father leaves the door open. I also testify that it is never too late to open the door between us and our children with simple words such as "I love you," "I am sorry," and "Please forgive me." We can begin now to create a home they will want to return to—not only now but in the eternities.

We can also help our obedient children leave the door of forgiveness open by expressing our love and appreciation to them and by helping them rejoice in the repentance of their siblings.

#### *Liken the scriptures unto ourselves*

With the door to our hearts open, we should learn how to *liken the scriptures to our lives*.

We often talk about teaching our children from the scriptures, but how do we do that?

Several years ago I was teaching our young son about the life and experiences of the brother of Jared. Although the story was very interesting, he was not engaged. I then asked what the story meant to him personally. It means so much when we ask our children, “What does it mean to you?” He said, “You know, it’s not that different from what Joseph Smith did in the grove when he prayed and got an answer.”

I said, “You’re about Joseph’s age. Do you think a prayer like his would be helpful to you?” Suddenly we weren’t talking about a long-ago story in a faraway land. We were talking about our son—about his life, his needs, and the way prayer could help him.

As parents we have the responsibility to help our children to “likened all scriptures [indeed, every part of the gospel of Jesus Christ] unto us [and unto our children], . . . for [the] profit and learning [of our families].”<sup>14</sup>

#### *Take advantage of teaching moments*

Are we likening all of our children’s gospel experiences to the real needs in their lives? Are we teaching them about the gift of the Holy Ghost, repentance, the Atonement, the sacrament, and the blessing of sacrament meeting as they meet the challenges in their lives? There is not enough time in formal meetings to teach our children everything they need to know. Therefore, we must *take advantage of everyday teaching moments*.

These moments are priceless. They come when we are working, playing, and struggling together. When they come, the Spirit of the Lord can help us know what to say and help our children accept our teaching.

#### *Trust the Good Shepherd*

What a joy and blessing to have the Spirit in our homes! And what a blessing it is to invite it through prayer, studying

the scriptures, speaking kindly, and showing appreciation to one another! Let us prepare our teaching moments by praying as Alma prayed for his son, “with much faith”<sup>15</sup> and all the energy of our souls; by fasting, searching the scriptures, repenting of our sins, and allowing the Holy Ghost to fill our hearts with love, forgiveness, and compassion. And then it will fill our homes. Then let us *trust the Good Shepherd*.

Moses’s mother, Jochebed, guided her son down the river with faith in the “Shepherd . . . of [our] souls.”<sup>16</sup> As parents we too can trust the Good Shepherd to guide and direct us. Isaiah promised that He “shall gently lead”<sup>17</sup> all those who bear responsibility for the young.

He will help us trust and honor the principles of agency, opposition, and the Atonement, even when our children make unwise decisions. Through His Spirit, He will help us teach our children to meet every challenge, trial, and tribulation in life by remembering who they are—children of God. We will be inspired with ways to help them “put on the whole armour of God”<sup>18</sup> so they can withstand the “fiery darts of the adversary”<sup>19</sup> with the “shield of faith”<sup>20</sup> and “the sword of the Spirit.”<sup>21</sup> As our children are spiritually armed and strengthened, He will bless them to endure faithfully to the end and return home, worthy to stand and live in their Heavenly Father’s presence forever.

Through it all, we will sorrow to see our family members suffer the slings and arrows of mortality. But we will stand all amazed at the love our Savior offers them. Because of Him, the buffetings need not defeat and destroy them but can soften, strengthen, and sanctify them.

#### **Jesus Christ is mighty to save**

To parents and families throughout the world, I testify that the Lord Jesus Christ is mighty to save. He is the Healer, the Redeemer, the rescuing Shepherd

who will leave the ninety and nine to find the one. If we are seeking the salvation of special “ones” in our own families, I bear testimony that they are within His reach. We assist Him in reaching them by faithfully living the gospel, being sealed in the temple, and living true to the covenants we make there.

Parents can take great comfort in the words of Elder Orson F. Whitney relating the teachings of Joseph Smith:

“The Prophet Joseph Smith declared—and he never taught more comforting doctrine—that the eternal sealings 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. Either in this life or the life to come, they will return. They will have to pay their debt to justice; they will suffer for their sins; and may tread a thorny path; but if it leads them at last, like the penitent Prodigal, to a loving and forgiving father’s heart and home, the painful experience will not have been in vain. Pray for your careless and disobedient children; hold on to them with your faith. Hope on, trust on, till you see the salvation of God.”<sup>22</sup>

I bear my special witness that Jesus Christ gave His life, making possible the salvation and exaltation of all the families of the earth. With all the feeling of a ten-

der parent, I express my love and the love of our Heavenly Father to you and your family.

May we gather our loved ones around us, “gird up [our] loins; [and] fresh courage take. Our God will never us forsake.” With faith, courage, and love, families will truly be together forever. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### NOTES

1. 2 Timothy 3:1.
2. 3 Nephi 2:3.
3. “Come, Come, Ye Saints,” *Hymns*, no. 30.
4. 1 Nephi 8:35–36.
5. 1 Nephi 8:37–38.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 93:42–43, 50.
7. *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
8. Deuteronomy 6:7.
9. Hebrews 11:23.
10. See Exodus 2:3–10; see also Jerrie W. Hurd, *Our Sisters in the Bible* (1983), 36–37.
11. See Hebrews 11:24–27.
12. Luke 15:17.
13. Luke 15:20.
14. 1 Nephi 19:23.
15. Mosiah 27:14.
16. 1 Peter 2:25.
17. Isaiah 40:11.
18. See Ephesians 6:11, 13; see also Doctrine and Covenants 27:15.
19. 1 Nephi 15:24; Doctrine and Covenants 3:8; see also Ephesians 6:16.
20. Ephesians 6:16; Doctrine and Covenants 27:17.
21. Ephesians 6:17; see also Doctrine and Covenants 27:18.
22. In Conference Report, Apr. 1929, 110.

## Elder Clate W. Mask Jr.

### Traveling through mud slides

Years ago my adventurous son Jeff and I found ourselves on an old bus bouncing along on a dirt road in Central

America at 1:00 a.m. We took the early, early bus because it was the only bus that day. A half hour later, the driver stopped for two missionaries. When they got on, we asked them where in the world they