

I Will Strengthen Thee; I Will Help Thee

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The greatest help we will have in strengthening families is to know and follow the doctrines of Christ.

Several months ago Sister Beck asked if I would consider speaking about families and tell a little about my experiences with families. I am a single woman and do not have any children of my own. I think Sister Beck thought that I was qualified to talk about families because I have never made a mistake with any of my own children. Many women can't claim that.

I am a social worker by profession and have worked with many families over the years—mostly with families who are experiencing troubles or great challenges. I have seen some heartbreaking situations where children have been badly hurt—both physically and emotionally. I have seen children who have been abandoned and forgotten due to the substance abuse or addictions of their parents. I have seen 18-year-olds who have been in foster care and are now out on their own without any support and backing of a loving family to help them.

Thankfully, most of us don't have abuse or neglect in our families, but every family will experience some type of challenge—illness, death, disobedience, financial problems, and so forth.

These problems raise some serious questions. What is happening to families? What is the difference between a stable family and one that is dysfunctional? What are some simple things that will help families? And who can provide relief to families?

Today I want to touch briefly on these questions and give you several observations I have made over the years in hopes that they may help.

What Is Happening to Families?

Satan is working overtime to attack the family. He tells us that marriage is not important, that children do not need a father and a mother, and that strong families are not important. He tells us that moral values are old-fashioned and silly. When challenges come, Satan tells us to abandon our beliefs and go with the ways of the world. He entices us with fame and fortune and tells us where to find the easy life. He attacks our faith in God and tries to discourage even the strongest and most loving families. Satan is delighted when we give in—even just a little.

What Is the Difference between a Stable Family and One That Is Dysfunctional?

The members of a stable family know who they are, where they are going, and what they want to achieve. The

members of a dysfunctional family do not know who they are; they have no plan, no anchor, and no core set of values or standards to set their course.

Some of the parents of dysfunctional families were taught good values but have gotten on the wrong path due to alcohol, drugs, or other addictions that have taken away their good judgment and their ability to make correct decisions. In a stable family, loving parents teach by example and don't just tell their children to do something. They do it with them and show them how things are done.

What Are Some Simple Things That Will Help Families?

Remember, children are precious. They are spirit children of God. I have seen the resiliency of the human soul shine forth at times when I couldn't imagine how a child could survive.

Dear sisters, love and nurture your children. Tell them you love them. Put your arms around them. Appropriate physical affection will accomplish miracles. Express kind words. Show them by example how to work. Teach them to pray. President James E. Faust said, "Praying together as a family is a bonding experience. Younger children can learn how to pray as they hear the prayers of their parents and older siblings. ... Individual prayer and family prayer are indispensable to personal and family happiness."¹

Read to your children. Read from the scriptures. Help them learn that the scriptures will guide them throughout their entire lives. Have family home evening with them. Let them know that family time together is very important to you.

Children are generally very accepting of their parents and the mistakes parents make. They often forgive, forget, and move on much more quickly than adults do. Don't feel guilty. Apologize when you have made a mistake. Seek the child's forgiveness. Change your ways and move on.

Remember that it takes a lot of patience to raise a child. As precious as they are, children can be exasperating, frustrating, and sometimes even naughty. It takes a tremendous amount of patience and restraint in order to avoid doing or saying things we will later regret. Sometimes parents need to put themselves in "time-out" in order to avoid making serious mistakes. Removing yourself from the room for a minute in order to regain control is often very helpful.

No better advice can be found than that given in "The Family: A Proclamation to the World."² Read it. Study it. Adopt it as your family standard. Make it the topic in several family home evening lessons so no one in the family has any misunderstanding about how your family operates.

Who Can Provide Relief to Families?

Obviously, the first responsibility for teaching children and strengthening the family lies with parents. However, there are many others who can help. I have wonderful parents, but they did not do it alone.

I was in the Tabernacle when President Gordon B. Hinckley first delivered the proclamation on the family at the general Relief Society meeting in September of 1995. That was a great occasion. I felt the significance of the message. I also found myself thinking, "This is a great guide for parents. It is also a big responsibility for parents." I thought for a moment that it really didn't pertain too much to me since I wasn't married and didn't have any children. But almost as quickly I thought, "But it does pertain to me. I am a member of a family. I am a

daughter, a sister, an aunt, a cousin, a niece, and a granddaughter. I do have responsibilities—and blessings—because I am a member of a family. Even if I were the only living member of my family, I am still a member of God’s family, and I have a responsibility to help strengthen other families.”

Elder Robert D. Hales said, “Strengthening families is our sacred duty as parents, children, extended family members, leaders, teachers, and individual members of the Church.”³

As Relief Society sisters we can help one another to strengthen families. We are given opportunities to serve in many capacities. We constantly come in contact with children and youth who may need just what we can offer. You older sisters have much good advice and experience to share with younger mothers. Sometimes a Young Women leader or a Primary teacher says or does just the thing that is needed to reinforce what a parent is trying to teach. And obviously we don’t need any particular calling to reach out to a friend or neighbor.

The greatest help we will have in strengthening families is to know and follow the doctrines of Christ and rely on Him to help us. So often as I have worked with families with problems, I have found myself wishing that these families knew of the Savior and were teaching their children the doctrines of Jesus Christ.

“And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death.”⁴

Christ has suffered everything we could possibly imagine. He knows how we feel. He understands. He will help.

The scriptures are full of examples of how Christ has helped and will help. Some of my favorites are:

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”⁵

“Whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions, and shall be lifted up at the last day.”⁶

“Be thou humble; and the Lord thy God shall lead thee by the hand, and give thee answer to thy prayers.”⁷

“As often as thou hast inquired thou hast received instruction of my Spirit.”⁸

“Be faithful and diligent in keeping the commandments of God, and I will encircle thee in the arms of my love.”⁹

President Hinckley said, “It is imperative that you not neglect your families. Nothing you have is more precious. ... When all is said and done, it is this family relationship which we will take with us into the life beyond.”¹⁰

Remember the great love of our Savior. He said in Isaiah 41:10, “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee.” Then in verse 13 He says again, “I will help thee.” And once more in verse 14 He says, “I will help thee.”

Believe the Savior. He will help us. He loves us. He wants us to be happy.

I testify that our Lord and Savior lives. I testify that He will help us. He has helped me many times, and He will help you. This I know. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. “Challenges Facing the Family,” *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, Jan. 10, 2004, 2.

2. See *Liahona*, Oct. 2004, 49; *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.

3. “Strengthening Families: Our Sacred Duty,” *Liahona*, July 1999, 37; *Ensign*, May 1999, 32.
4. Mosiah 3:7.
5. Matthew 11:28.
6. Alma 36:3.
7. D&C 112:10.
8. D&C 6:14.
9. D&C 6:20.
10. “Rejoicing in the Privilege to Serve,” *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, June 21, 2003, 22.



Notes

1. “Challenges Facing the Family,” *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, Jan. 10, 2004, 2.
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