

Elder L. Tom Perry

A mother's preparation

I recently had the opportunity to travel with Elder Donald L. Hallstrom to visit five cities in the great central area of the United States. In each city we visited, we would hold a meeting with the full-time missionaries, followed by a meeting with the stake and ward leaders regarding missionary work. Between each of the two meetings, the stake Relief Society would prepare a light dinner for us to afford us time to meet with the stake presidents. When we reached Milwaukee, Wisconsin, two young families appealed to the Relief Society to let them prepare and serve the dinner. The two husbands manned the kitchen. The two mothers supervised the table arrangements and the serving of the food. Three young children handled the table setting and the serving of the food under the supervision of their mothers. This was an opportunity for the mothers to have a teaching opportunity with their children. It was very special to watch the children respond to every detail as they were taught by their mothers. They carried out their assignments completely and fully.

The experience caused me to reflect on the training I had received from my mother. Like the prophet Nephi and also like so many of you, I was born of goodly parents (see 1 Nephi 1:1).

One of my nieces recently shared with me four notebooks my mother had filled with notes as she prepared to teach her class in Relief Society. I would imagine these notebooks—and there are others I have not yet examined—represent hundreds of hours of preparation by my mother.

Mother was a great teacher who was diligent and thorough in her preparation. I have distinct memories of the days preceding her lessons. The dining room table would be covered with reference materials and the notes she was preparing for her lesson. There was so much material prepared that I'm sure only a small portion of

it was ever used during the class, but I'm just as sure that none of her preparation was ever wasted. How can I be sure about this? As I flipped through the pages of her notebooks, it was as if I were hearing my mother teach me one more time. Again, there was too much in her notebooks on any single topic to ever share in a single class session, but what she didn't use in her class she used to teach her children.

I believe it is even safe to say that while my mother was an enormously effective teacher among the sisters at Relief Society, her best teaching occurred with her children in the home. Of course, this was largely due to the greater amount of time she had to teach her children compared to teaching the Relief Society sisters, but I also like to think she prepared so thoroughly, first, to be an example to her children of diligent Church service and, second, because she recognized that what she learned from preparing her lessons could be used repeatedly for a higher purpose—teaching her sons and her daughters.

Teaching in the home

Please allow me to reminisce for a few moments and share a few of the lessons I learned from my mother about teaching the gospel in the home. My mother understood the value of teaching her children about standards, values, and doctrine while they were young. While she was grateful to others who taught her children outside the home at either school or church, she recognized that parents are entrusted with the education of their children and, ultimately, parents must ensure that their children are being taught what their Heavenly Father would have them learn. My siblings and I were quizzed very carefully by our mother after we had been taught away from the home to be certain the correct lessons were reaching our ears and shaping our minds.

I used to think some days as I ran home from school that I was through learning for the day, but this illusion was quickly destroyed when I saw my mother standing at the door waiting for me. When we were young, we each had a desk in the kitchen where we could continue to be taught by her as she performed household duties and prepared supper. She was a natural teacher and far more demanding of us than our teachers at school and church.

The scope of Mother's teaching included both secular and spiritual lessons. She made sure none of us were falling behind in our schoolwork, which she would often supplement. She also would practice her Relief Society lessons with us. We, of course, received the unabridged versions found in her notebooks, not the abridged versions that had to fit in a single class period.

Part of our learning at home also involved memorizing scriptures, including the Articles of Faith, and the words of prophets, seers, and revelators. My mother was someone who believed a mind would become weak if it was not constantly exercised. She taught us as we would wash the dishes, churn the butter, and help in many other ways. She did not believe in letting idle thoughts enter her children's minds, even when they were engaged in physical labor.

I am not using my mother as a role model for parents in today's world. Times are very different today, but while times may change, a parent's teaching must never be devalued. Many activities link the values of one generation to the next, but perhaps the most central of these activities is parents teaching children in the home. This is especially true when we consider the teaching of values, moral and ethical standards, and faith.

Parents' responsibility to teach children

Teaching in the home is becoming increasingly important in today's world, where the influence of the adversary is so

widespread and he is attacking, attempting to erode and destroy the very foundation of our society, even the family. Parents must resolve that teaching in the home is a most sacred and important responsibility. While other institutions, such as church and school, can assist parents to "train up a child in the way he [or she] should go" (Proverbs 22:6), ultimately this responsibility rests with parents. According to the great plan of happiness, it is parents who are entrusted with the care and development of our Heavenly Father's children. Our families are an integral part of His work and glory—"to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). On God's eternal stage, it is usually intended that parents act as the central cast members in their children's lives. Fortunately, there are understudies involved in the production who may step in when parents can't. It, however, is parents who have been commanded by the Lord to bring up their children in light and truth (see D&C 93:40).

Parents must bring light and truth into their homes by one family prayer, one scripture study session, one family home evening, one book read aloud, one song, and one family meal at a time. They know that the influence of righteous, conscientious, persistent, daily parenting is among the most powerful and sustaining forces for good in the world. The health of any society, the happiness of its people, their prosperity, and their peace all find common roots in the teaching of children in the home.

President Joseph Fielding Smith taught: "It is the duty of parents to teach their children these saving principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ, so that they will know why they are to be baptized and that they may be impressed in their hearts with a desire to continue to keep the commandments of God after they are baptized, that they may come back into his presence. Do you, my good brethren and sisters, want your families, your children; do you want to be

sealed to your fathers and your mothers before you . . . ? If so, then you must begin by teaching at the cradle-side. You are to teach by example as well as precept” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1948, 153).

The power of teaching

The example of my mother as a teacher in the home invites another thought, more generally about teaching. The leaders of the Church spend a great deal of time thinking about how to improve teaching in the Church. Why do we invest this time and effort? It is because we believe in the immense power of teaching to increase the faith of individuals and strengthen families. It is my belief that one of the most effective things we can do to improve teaching in the Church is to improve teaching in our homes. Our teaching in the home prepares us to teach more effectively at church, and our teaching at church helps us to teach more effectively at home. Throughout the Church there are dining room tables covered with reference materials and notebooks filled with ideas for lessons to be taught. There is no such thing as overpreparing to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ, for gospel insights, whether or not they are used during class time, can always be taught in the home.

The role of mothers

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

“Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children. ‘Children are an heritage of the Lord’ (Psalm 127:3). Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, and to teach them to love and serve one another, observe the commandments of God, and be law-abiding citizens wherever they live. . . .

“. . . 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” (*Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102).

According to “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” the principles I have taught about teaching in the home apply to both parents, but they are especially crucial to the role of a mother. Fathers most often spend much of their day away from home in their employment. That is one of the many reasons so much of the responsibility for teaching the child in the home falls on mothers. While circumstances do vary and the ideal isn’t always possible, I believe it is by divine design that the role of motherhood emphasizes the nurturing and teaching of the next generation.

We see so many challenges today from distracting and destructive influences intended to mislead God’s children. We are seeing many young people who lack the deep spiritual roots necessary to remain standing in faith as storms of unbelief and despair swirl around them. Too many of our Father in Heaven’s children are being overcome by worldly desires. The onslaught of wickedness against our children is at once more subtle and more brazen than it has ever been. Teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ in the home adds another layer of insulation to protect our children from worldly influences.

God bless you wonderful mothers and fathers in Zion. He has entrusted to your care His eternal children. As parents we partner, even join, with God in bringing to pass His work and glory among His children. It is our sacred duty to do our very best. Of this I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.