

Well, I didn't know. What I do know is that my dad, a self-educated accountant, a "bookkeeper" as they were called in our little town, with very few clients, probably never wore a new suit or a new shirt or a new pair of shoes for two years so his son could have all of those for his mission. Furthermore, what I did not know but then came to know was that my mother, who had never worked out of the home in her married life, took a job at a local department store so that my mission expenses could be met. And not one word of that was ever conveyed to me on my mission. Not a single word was said regarding any of it. How many fathers in this Church have done exactly what my father did? And how many mothers, in these difficult economic times, are still doing what my mother did?

My father has been gone for 34 years, so like President Faust, I will have to wait to fully thank him on the other side. But my sweet mother, who turns 95 next week, is happily watching this broadcast today at her home in St. George, so it's not too late to thank her. To you, Mom and Dad, and to all the moms and dads and families and faithful people everywhere, I thank you for sacrificing for your children (and for other people's children!), for wanting so much to give them advantages you never had, for wanting so much to give them the happiest life you could provide.

"My joy is full"

My thanks to all you wonderful members of the Church—and legions of good

people not of our faith—for proving every day of your life that the pure love of Christ "never faileth."⁴ No one of you is insignificant, in part because you make the gospel of Jesus Christ what it is—a living reminder of His grace and mercy, a private but powerful manifestation in small villages and large cities of the good He did and the life He gave bringing peace and salvation to other people. We are honored beyond expression to be counted one with you in such a sacred cause.

As Jesus said to the Nephites, so say I today:

"Because of your faith . . . , my joy is full.

"And when he had said these words, he wept."⁵

Brothers and sisters, seeing your example, I pledge anew *my* determination to be better, to be more faithful—more kind and devoted, more charitable and true as our Father in Heaven is and as so many of you already are. This I pray in the name of our Great Exemplar in all things—even the name of the Lord Jesus Christ—amen.

NOTES

1. See Hebrews 12:12; Doctrine and Covenants 81:5.
2. Matthew 25:40.
3. James E. Faust, in Conference Report, Oct. 1997, 78; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 59.
4. 1 Corinthians 13:8; see also Moroni 7:46–47.
5. 3 Nephi 17:20–21.

Rosemary M. Wixom

Helping children stay on the path

I recently observed the birth of tiny Kate Elizabeth. After she entered this world and was placed into her mother's arms, Kate reached out and caught hold of her mother's

finger. It was as if little Kate were saying, "If I hold on, will you help me stay on the path back to my Heavenly Father?"

At age seven, Joseph Smith contracted typhoid fever, and an infection settled in his leg. Dr. Nathan Smith was pioneering

a procedure by which the infected leg could be saved. Without anesthesia, Dr. Smith would need to cut Joseph's leg and actually remove portions of the infected bone. Joseph declined brandy to endure the pain and refused to be tied down but said, "I will have my father sit on the bed and hold me in his arms, and then I will do whatever is necessary."¹

For children all over the world, we say: "Take my hand. Hold on tight. We will stay on the path together back to our Heavenly Father."

Parents, grandparents, neighbors, friends, Primary leaders—each of us can reach out to hold on to the children. We can stop, kneel down, and look into their eyes and feel of their innate desire to follow the Savior. Take hold of their hands. Walk with them. It is our chance to anchor them on the path of faith.

Holding tight to the iron rod

No child needs to walk the path alone, so long as we speak freely to our children of the plan of salvation. Understanding the plan will help them hold to the truths that they are children of God and He has a plan for them, that they lived with Him in the premortal existence, that they shouted for joy to come to this earth, and that through the Savior's help, we all can return to our Heavenly Father's presence. If they understand the plan and who they are, they will not fear.

In Alma 24 we read, "He loveth our souls [and] he loveth our children; therefore, . . . the plan of salvation might be made known unto us as well as unto future generations."²

We begin to make the plan known to our children when we hold tight to the iron rod ourselves.

When we are holding tight to the iron rod, we are in a position to place our hands over theirs and walk the strait and narrow path together. Our example is magnified in their eyes. They will follow our cadence

when they feel secure in our actions. We do not need to be perfect—just honest and sincere. Children want to feel as one with us. When a parent says, "We can do it! We can read the scriptures daily as a family," the children will follow!

One such family with four young children writes: "We decided to start small because of our children's short attention spans. Our oldest child was not yet reading, but she could repeat our words, so we began reading the Book of Mormon, just three verses each night. My husband and I would read one verse each, and then Sydney would repeat a verse. We progressed to four verses and then five verses as the boys began to repeat their own verses. Yes, it was tedious, but we kept going. We tried to focus on consistency instead of speed. It took us three and a half years to finish the Book of Mormon. It was a great feeling of accomplishment!"

The mother continues: "Daily family scripture reading is a habit in our family now. Our children are comfortable with scriptural language, and my husband and I take opportunity to bear testimony of truths. Most important, the Spirit has increased in our home."

Do you take from this family's experience what I do? When our intent is to hold tight to the word of God, our reading of the scriptures can be just one verse at a time. It's never too late to begin. You can start now.

Teaching in every circumstance

The world will teach our children if we do not, and children are capable of learning all the world will teach them at a very young age. What we want them to know five years from now needs to be part of our conversation with them today. Teach them in every circumstance; let every dilemma, every consequence, every trial that they may face provide an opportunity to teach them how to hold on to gospel truths.

Shannon, a young mother, did not expect that she would teach her children the power of prayer when they piled into their van to drive to their home just 40 minutes away. There was no storm when they left their grandmother's home, but as they began to drive through the canyon, the light snow turned into a blizzard. The van began sliding on the surface of the road. Soon visibility was near zero. The two youngest children could sense the stress of the situation and began to cry. Shannon said to the older children, Heidi and Thomas, ages eight and six, "You need to pray. We need Heavenly Father's help to get home safely. Pray that we will not get stuck and that we will not slide off the road." Her hands shook as she steered the car, yet she could hear the whisper of little prayers repeatedly coming from the backseat: "Heavenly Father, please help us get home safely; please help us so we will not slide off the road."

In time, the prayers calmed the two little ones, and they stopped their crying just as they learned that a road closure prevented them from driving any farther. Cautiously, they turned around and found a motel for the night. Once in the motel, they knelt down and thanked Heavenly Father for their safety. That night a mother taught her children the power of holding true to prayer.

What trials will our children face? Like Joseph Smith, our children can find the courage to "do whatever is necessary." When we are intentional about holding them and teaching them of Heavenly Father's plan through prayer and scriptures, they will come to know *where* they came from, *why* they are here, and *where* they are going.

A victory tunnel

Last spring my husband and I attended a soccer game of our four-year-old grandson.

You could feel the excitement on the field as the players ran in every direction chasing the soccer ball. When the final whistle blew, the players were unaware of who won or who lost. They had simply played the game. The coaches directed the players to shake hands with the opposing team members. Then I observed something quite remarkable. The coach called for a victory tunnel. All the parents, grandparents, and any spectators who had come to observe the game stood up and formed two lines facing each other, and by raising their arms they formed an arch. The children squealed as they ran through the cheering adults and down the path formed by the spectators. Soon the children from the opposing team joined the fun as all the players—the winners and the losers—were cheered on by the adults as they ran the path of the victory tunnel.

In my mind's eye, I had another picture. I had the feeling I was seeing children living the plan, the plan Heavenly Father has created for each individual child. They were running the strait and narrow path through the arms of the spectators who love them, each one feeling the joy of being on the path.

Jacob said, "O how great the plan of our God!"³ The Savior has "marked the path and led the way."⁴ I testify that as we hold on to our children and follow the Savior's lead, we will all return to our heavenly home and be safe in our Heavenly Father's arms. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. See Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, ed. Preston Nibley (1958), 56–57.
2. Alma 24:14.
3. 2 Nephi 9:13.
4. "How Great the Wisdom and the Love," *Hymns*, no. 195.