

NOTES

1. 1 Timothy 4:11–12.
2. Genesis 2:3.
3. Exodus 20:8–11.
4. Moses 5:5, 7.
5. See, for example, Mark 10:32–34; John 2:19; 10:17; 12:32.
6. Matthew 26:26–28.
7. 3 Nephi 18:6–7.
8. See Joseph Smith—History 1:68–69, 72; see also Doctrine and Covenants 27:12–13.
9. Doctrine and Covenants 59:9–10, 13.
10. John 17:16.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 59:12.
12. In Bryant S. Hinckley, *Sermons and Missionary Services of Melvin Joseph Ballard* (1949), 150.
13. Joseph Smith Translation, Mark 14:21, in Bible appendix.
14. Doctrine and Covenants 6:12.
15. Mark 2:27.
16. Doctrine and Covenants 115:5.
17. 3 Nephi 11:11.
18. Psalm 23:5.

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Looking to children as examples

Our Father in Heaven, in His great wisdom and love, sends His spirit sons and daughters to this earth as children. They come to families as precious gifts with a divine nature and destiny. Our Heavenly Father knows children are a key to helping us become like Him. There is so much we can learn from children.

This important truth was evidenced some years ago as a member of the Seventy was on assignment in Hong Kong. He visited a very humble ward that was struggling in many ways, unable to provide for its own needs. As the bishop described their situation, the General Authority felt the impression to have the members pay their tithing. The bishop, knowing their dire circumstances, was concerned about how he could carry out that counsel. He thought about it and decided he would approach some of the most faith-filled members of his ward and ask them to pay their tithing. The next Sunday he went to the Primary. He taught the children about the Lord's law of tithing and asked if they would be willing to pay tithing on the money they earned. The children said they would. And they did.

The bishop later went to the adults in the ward and shared with them that for the past six months their faithful children had been paying tithing. He asked them if they would be willing to follow the example of these children and do the same. The people were so touched by the sacrifices the children were willing to make that they did what was necessary to pay their tithing. And the windows of heaven were opened. With the example of these faithful children, a ward grew in obedience and in testimony.

It was Jesus Christ Himself who taught us to look to children as an example. The New Testament records His answer when His Apostles disputed who should be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus answered their question with a small yet powerful object lesson. He called a little child to Him and set him in the midst of them and said:

“Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

“Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3–4).

Lessons to learn from children

What is it we should learn from children? What qualities do they possess and what examples do they demonstrate that can help us in our own spiritual development?

These precious children of God come to us with believing hearts. They are full of faith and receptive to feelings of the Spirit. They exemplify humility, obedience, and love. They are often the first to love and the first to forgive.

Let me share some experiences of how children can bless our lives with their innocent yet powerful examples of Christlike attributes.

Todd, a little boy just two years old, recently went with his mother to an art museum that was showing a special exhibit of beautiful paintings of the Savior. As they walked past these sacred images, she heard her little boy reverently saying the name “Jesus.” She looked down to see him folding his arms and bowing his head as he viewed the paintings. Could we learn from Todd something about an attitude of humility, of reverence, and of love for the Lord?

Last fall I watched the example of a 10-year-old boy in Armenia. As we waited for sacrament meeting to begin, he noticed the oldest member of the branch arrive. He was the one who quickly went to her side, offering his arm to steady her faltering steps. He assisted her to the front row of the chapel, where she could hear. Could his small act of kindness teach us that those who are greatest in the Lord’s kingdom are those who look for opportunities to serve others?

Katie, a Primary-age girl, taught us as we saw her influence on her family. She attended Primary and was drawn to the teachings of the gospel. With growing faith and testimony, Katie left a note on her parents’ pillow. She wrote that the gospel truths had found a “home in her heart.” She shared

her longing to be close to her Heavenly Father, to be obedient to His commandments, and to have their family sealed in the temple. The simple testimony of their sweet daughter touched her parents’ hearts in a powerful way. Katie and her family did receive sacred temple ordinances that bound their family together forever. Katie’s believing heart and example of faith helped bring eternal blessings to her family. Could her sincere testimony and desire to follow the Lord’s plan lead us to see more clearly what really matters most?

Our family is learning from a close relative, six-year-old Liam. This past year he has battled aggressive brain cancer. After two difficult surgeries, it was decided that radiation would also be necessary. During these radiation treatments, he was required to be all alone and lie absolutely still. Liam did not want to be sedated because he disliked the way it made him feel. He was determined that if he could just hear his dad’s voice over the intercom, he could lie still without the sedative.

During these anxious times, his dad spoke to him with words of encouragement and love. “Liam, although you can’t see me, I am right here. I know you can do it. I love you.” Liam successfully accomplished the 33 required radiation treatments while holding perfectly still, a feat his doctors thought would be impossible without sedation for one so young. Through months of pain and difficulty, Liam’s contagious optimism has been a powerful example of meeting adversity with hope and even happiness. His doctors, nurses, and countless others have been inspired by his courage.

We are all learning important lessons from Liam—lessons about choosing faith and trusting in the Lord. Just like Liam, we cannot see our Heavenly Father, but we can listen for His voice to give us the strength we need to endure the challenges of life.

Could Liam's example help us to better understand King Benjamin's words to become as a child—submissive, meek, humble, patient, and full of love? (see Mosiah 3:19).

These children are providing examples of some of the childlike qualities we need to develop or rediscover in ourselves in order to enter into the kingdom of heaven. They are bright spirits who are untarnished by the world—teachable and full of faith. It is no wonder the Savior has a special love and appreciation for little children.

“Behold your little ones”

Among the transcendent events of the Savior's visit to the Americas, His tender ministry to the children stands apart. In a poignant way He reached out to each child.

“And he took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them.

“And when he had done this he wept. . . .

“And he spake unto the multitude, and said unto them: Behold your little ones” (3 Nephi 17:21–23).

Elder M. Russell Ballard taught us the importance of the Savior's admonition to “behold your little ones” when he said: “Notice that He didn't say ‘glance at them’ or ‘casually observe them’ or ‘occasionally take a look in their general direction.’ He said to *behold* them. To me that means that we should embrace them with our eyes and with our hearts; we should see and appreciate them for who they really are: spirit children of our Heavenly Father, with divine attributes” (“Great Shall Be the Peace of Thy Children,” *Ensign*, Apr. 1994, 59).

There is not a more perfect place to behold our little ones than in our families. Home is a place where we can all learn and grow together. One of our beautiful Primary songs teaches this truth:

God gave us families to help us become
what He wants us to be—

This is how He shares His love, for the
fam'ly is of God.

[“The Family Is of God,” *Friend*, Oct. 2008, 28–29]

It is here in our families, in an atmosphere of love, where we see and appreciate in a more personal way the divine attributes of His spirit children. It is here in our families where our hearts can be softened and in humility we desire to change, to become more childlike. It is a process by which we can become more Christlike.

A key to spiritual growth

Have some of life's experiences taken from you the believing heart and childlike faith you once had? If so, look around at the children in your life. And then look again. They may be children in your family, across the street, or in the Primary in your ward. If we have a heart to learn and a willingness to follow the example of children, their divine attributes can hold a key to unlocking our own spiritual growth.

I will always be grateful for the blessing of my own children. The example of each one has taught me lessons I need. They have helped me to change for the better.

I bear my humble but certain testimony that Jesus is the Christ. He is the one perfect Son—submissive, meek, humble, patient, and so full of love. May each of us have a heart to follow His example, to become as a little child, and thereby return to our heavenly home, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.