

Elder Richard J. Maynes

The principle of eternal families

Early on in my service as a young missionary in Uruguay and Paraguay, I realized one of the great attractions to those seeking to know more about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was their interest in our doctrine regarding the family. In fact, since the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ, truth-seeking investigators have been drawn to the doctrine that families can be together forever.

The principle of eternal families is an essential element in Heavenly Father's great plan for His children. Fundamental to that plan is the understanding that we have a *heavenly* family as well as an *earthly* family. The Apostle Paul teaches us that Heavenly Father is the Father of our spirits:

"That they should seek the Lord . . . and find him, . . .

"For in him we live, and move, and have our being; . . . For we are also his offspring."¹

Being offspring of a loving Heavenly Father is such a basic principle of the gospel of Jesus Christ that even our children proclaim its truth as they sing the Primary song "I Am a Child of God." Remember the words?

I am a child of God,
And he has sent me here,
Has given me an earthly home
With parents kind and dear.

Lead me, guide me, walk beside me,
Help me find the way.
Teach me all that I must do
To live with him someday.²

Recognizing that we have a *heavenly* family helps us understand the eternal nature of our *earthly* families. The Doctrine and Covenants teaches us that the family is fundamental to the order of heaven: "And that same sociality which exists among us

here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory."³

Happiness in family life

Understanding the eternal nature of the family is a critical element in understanding Heavenly Father's plan for His children. The adversary, on the other hand, wants to do everything in his power to destroy Heavenly Father's plan. In his attempt to defeat God's plan, he is leading an unprecedented attack on the institution of the family. Some of the more powerful weapons he uses in his attack are selfishness, greed, and pornography.

Our eternal happiness is *not* one of Satan's objectives. He knows that an essential key to making men and women miserable like himself is to deprive them of family relationships which have *eternal* potential. Because Satan understands that true happiness in this life and in the eternities is found in the form of family, he does everything in his power to destroy it.

The ancient prophet Alma calls God's plan for His children "the great plan of happiness."⁴ The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, whom we sustain as prophets, seers, and revelators, have offered us this inspired counsel with regard to happiness and family life: "The family is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity. Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ."⁵

This happiness spoken of by Alma and more recently by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will most surely be found in the home with family. It will be found in abundance if we

do everything in our power to establish a Christ-centered home.

Establishing a Christ-centered home

Sister Maynes and I learned some important principles as we began the process of establishing a Christ-centered home early in our marriage. We started by following the counsel of our Church leaders. We brought our children together and held weekly family home evenings as well as daily prayer and scripture study. It was not always easy, convenient, or successful, but over time these simple gatherings became treasured family traditions.

We learned that our children might not remember everything about the family home evening lesson later in the week, but they would remember that *we held it*. We learned that later in the day at school they would probably not remember the exact words of the scriptures or the prayer, but they would remember that *we did read* scriptures and *we did have* prayer. Brothers and sisters, there is great power and protection for us and our youth in establishing celestial traditions in the home.

Learning, teaching, and practicing the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ in our homes helps create a culture where the Spirit can dwell. Through establishing these celestial traditions in our homes, we will be able to overcome the false traditions of the world and learn to put the needs and concerns of others first.

The responsibility for establishing a Christ-centered home lies both with parents and with children. Parents are responsible to teach their children in love and righteousness. Parents will be held accountable before the Lord in how they perform their sacred responsibilities. Parents teach their children *with* words and *through* example. This poem by C. C. Miller titled “The Echo” illustrates the importance and impact parents have as they influence their children:

’Twas a sheep not a lamb
That strayed away in the parable Jesus
told,

A grown-up sheep that strayed away
From the ninety and nine in the fold.
And why for the sheep should we seek
And earnestly hope and pray?

Because there is danger when sheep
go wrong:

They lead the lambs astray.
Lambs will follow the sheep, you know,
Wherever the sheep may stray.

When sheep go wrong,
It won’t take long till the lambs are as
wrong as they.

And so with the sheep we earnestly
plead

For the sake of the lambs today,
For when the sheep are lost
What a terrible cost

The lambs will have to pay.⁶

The consequences to parents who lead their children astray are laid before us by the Lord in the Doctrine and Covenants: “And again, inasmuch as parents have children in Zion . . . that teach them *not* to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, . . . the sin be upon the heads of the parents.”⁷

Family members should work together

It is difficult to overstate the importance parents have in teaching their children celestial traditions through word and example. Children also play an important role in establishing a Christ-centered home. Let me share with you a short talk recently given by Will, my eight-year-old grandson, that illustrates this principle:

“I like to ride horses and go roping with my dad. A rope has different strands woven together to make it strong. If a rope had only one strand, it wouldn’t be able to get the job done. But because there are more strands that work together, we are

able to use it in many different ways and it is strong.

“Families can be like ropes. When only one person is working hard and doing what is right, the family will not be as strong as when everyone is putting forth the effort to help each other.

“I know that when I do what is right, I am helping my family. When I am treating my sister, Isabelle, nicely, we both have fun and it makes my mom and dad happy. If my mom needs to do something, I can help her by playing with my little brother, Joey. I also can help my family by keeping my room clean and helping out whenever I can with a good attitude. Since I am the oldest child in my family, I know being a good example is important. I can try my best to choose the right and follow the commandments.

“I know that kids can help their families be strong like a strong rope. When everyone does their best and works together, families can be happy and strong.”

When parents preside over the family in love and righteousness and teach their children the gospel of Jesus Christ by word and *through* example, and when children love and support their parents by learning and practicing the principles

their parents teach, the result will be the establishment of a Christ-centered home.

Brothers and sisters, as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we understand and believe in the eternal nature of the family. This understanding and belief should inspire us to do everything in our power to establish a Christ-centered home. I bear you my testimony that as we strive to do this, we will more fully practice the love and service that was exemplified through the life and Atonement of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and as a result, our homes can truly feel like heaven on earth. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Acts 17:27–28.
2. “I Am a Child of God,” *Hymns*, no. 301.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 130:2; see also Robert D. Hales, in Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 86; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 64.
4. Alma 42:8.
5. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129.
6. C. C. Miller, “The Echo,” in *Best-Loved Poems of the LDS People*, ed. Jack M. Lyon and others (1996), 312–13.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 68:25; italics added.

Elder Cecil O. Samuelson Jr.

Our testimonies

One of the great blessings of my life over many years has been the opportunity to be surrounded by and work with the young people of the Church. I consider these associations and friendships to be among the sweetest and most valuable of my life. They also are much of the basis for the optimism I have for the future of the Church, society, and the world.

During these interactions I have also had the privilege of conferring with some who have had various doubts or challenges

with their testimonies. While the specifics have been varied and occasionally unique, many of the questions and causes for confusion have been quite similar. Likewise, these are issues and concerns not restricted to any demographic or age-group. They may trouble those who are multigenerational Church members, relatively new Church members, and also those just becoming familiar with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Their questions are usually the result of honest inquiry or curiosity. Because the implications are so significant and serious for