

Teaching Self-Reliance to Children and Youth

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Let us follow our Savior, Jesus Christ, and His gospel by becoming self-reliant throughout our lives and teaching this to our children and youth.

I will speak about self-reliance and how it can be taught to children and to youth. Self-reliance may be perceived as being subject matter for adults. I've come to know that adults can best be on the path toward self-reliance when they have been taught the gospel of Jesus Christ and have practiced its doctrine and principles since childhood and as youth in the home.

The best illustration is a great real-life example. Wilfried Vanie, his seven siblings, and his mother joined the Church in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, when he was six years old. He was baptized at eight. His father, the main provider in the family, died when Wilfried was eleven.

Though saddened by the family situation, Wilfried decided to continue in school, with his mother's encouragement and with Church support. He graduated from secondary school and served a full-time mission in the Ghana Cape Coast Mission, where he learned English. After his mission, he went on to the university and obtained a diploma in accounting and finance. Though it was hard to obtain employment in this field, he found work in the tourism and hospitality industry.

He started as a waiter in a five-star hotel, but his passion to improve pushed him to learn more until he became a bilingual receptionist there. When a new hotel opened, he was hired as the night auditor. Later, he enrolled in BYU-Pathway Worldwide and is currently studying a course to obtain a certificate in hospitality and tourism management. His desire is to one day become the manager of a high-end hotel. Wilfried can provide for his eternal companion and two children, as well as help his mother and his siblings. He currently serves in the Church as a member of the stake high council.

Self-reliance is defined as “the ability, commitment, and effort to provide the spiritual and temporal necessities of life for self and family.”¹ Striving to be self-reliant is part of our work along the covenant path that leads us back to Heavenly Father and to His Son, Jesus Christ. It will strengthen our faith in Jesus Christ and joyfully bind us to Him through the covenants and ordinances of salvation and

exaltation. Self-reliance is a doctrine of the gospel of Jesus Christ, not a program. It is a process that lasts a lifetime, not an event.

We become self-reliant throughout our lives by growing in spiritual strength, improving our physical and emotional health, pursuing our education and employment, and being temporally prepared.² Is this task ever finished during our lives? *Nō*, it is a lifelong process of learning, growth, and work. It never ends; it is a continuous, daily process.

How can we teach the doctrine and principles of self-reliance to our children and youth? One important way is to regularly apply the principles of the Children and Youth program. Parents and children learn the gospel of Jesus Christ, participate in service and activities, and work together in four areas of personal development that are unique for each child. It is no longer the same prescribed program for all.

The *Children's Guidebook* says: "When Jesus was your age, He learned and grew. You are learning and growing too. The scriptures say: 'Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man' (Luke 2:52)."³ This scripture refers to growth and learning in the spiritual aspect, favor with God; the social aspect, favor with man; the physical aspect, stature; and the intellectual aspect, wisdom. These developmental areas apply to all of us, no matter our age. When do we teach them? In Deuteronomy 6:6–7 we read:

"And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:

"And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

We teach these things to children by our good example, by working and serving with them, studying the scriptures, and following the teachings of Jesus Christ as taught by prophets.

I've mentioned that in the Children and Youth program, children choose different goals in each one of the four areas of development. It is important that they create their own goals in each area. Parents and leaders can teach, counsel, and support.

For example, our granddaughter Miranda is very motivated to grow spiritually by participating in daily early-morning seminary classes. She became interested by hearing positive comments from other seminary students in her ward. Her mother does not have to wake her up for class. On her own, she is up and connected by videoconference at the appointed time of 6:20 in the morning because she has developed good habits that help her to do so. My own parents told me recently that Miranda now talks more when she visits them, as she has grown in self-confidence. These are lessons for life and growth with noticeable outcomes.

Parents, grandparents, leaders, and friends assist in the growth and development of the children. Fully engaged ministering brothers and sisters, together with priesthood and organization leaders of the ward, provide support. "The Family: A

Proclamation to the World” says: “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. ... Extended families should lend support when needed.”⁴ That last line refers to grandparents, among others.

As we serve in West Africa, my wife, Nuria, has done a remarkable job ministering to and remaining connected with our family and grandchildren across the ocean. She does this by using technology. She reads books to the younger grandchildren. She teaches the older granddaughters topics like the story of our family, science, the history of Puerto Rico, the Articles of Faith, and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Distances nowadays do not limit connecting, belonging, and ministering to and teaching the rising generation of our families. I also join in with Nuria when I can to teach our precious grandchildren, to love them, and to spoil them and make them laugh.

You should notice the inspired similarities between the Children and Youth program and building self-reliance. The four areas of development in each are very similar. Spiritual strength in self-reliance relates to the spiritual in Children and Youth. Physical and emotional health in self-reliance connect with the physical and social in Children and Youth. Education, employment, and temporal preparedness in self-reliance are akin to the intellectual in the Children and Youth program.

In closing, let us follow our Savior, Jesus Christ, and His gospel by becoming self-reliant throughout our lives and teaching this to our children and youth. We can do this best by

1. being good examples of service to others,
2. living and teaching the doctrine and principles of self-reliance, and
3. obeying the commandment to build self-reliance as part of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Doctrine and Covenants 104:15–16 says:

“It is my purpose to provide for my saints, for all things are mine.

“But it must needs be done in mine own way; and behold this is the way that I, the Lord, have decreed to provide for my saints, that the poor shall be exalted, in that the rich are made low.”

This is the Church of Jesus Christ. His gospel blesses families here on earth and throughout the eternities. It guides us in our lives as we strive to become eternal families. I know this is true. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 22.0, ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
2. See *General Handbook*, 22.1.
3. *Personal Development: Children's Guidebook* (2019), 4.
4. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," ChurchofJesusChrist.org.