

My mother is a champion nurturer. It is not uncommon for her to ask visitors if they are hungry, and one doesn't often leave her home without first eating a sandwich or warm soup. When my father was the mission president in São Paulo, Brazil, my mother fed 22 people nightly at our large dining room table. As a child I was enraptured by the dinner conversation, which usually centered on the missionary stories and efforts of those who ate with us. My mother, a strengthening influence to hundreds of missionaries, created the dinnertime venue where seeds of gospel testimony were sown and nurtured.

“The [Family: A Proclamation to the World](#)” states, “Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children.”¹ A good nurturer carries power and influence. The Latin word *nutrire*, from which the English word *nurture* originates, means “to suckle or nourish,” or, in the full interpretation, “to feed, foster, care for, or rear.” True power is found in the hands of a worthy nurturer, especially at mealtimes.

A Mother's Love

I know of a mother who used her nurturing power to strengthen and bless a son and bring him back to Church activity. At age 18 the son announced that he did not intend to serve a mission. His activity in the Church dwindled. But the mother had faith, and she was a powerful nurturer. Every morning at 4:00 a.m., when her son got up to go to work, the mother arose at the same hour. She lovingly prepared a breakfast for him and packed a large lunch that he could take with him. She sat with him while he ate his breakfast and listened as he talked through his struggles in those dawn hours. This went on month after month for more than a year. Then one morning the son told his mother he was going to make the changes necessary to qualify to serve a mission. She listened morning after morning as he talked about his feelings and challenges, encouraged him as he met with the bishop, and fed him at her table in her consecrated home. Eventually her son received a mission call. He served an honorable mission and continued into temple marriage and faithful fatherhood. He later said of the mighty change that took place in his heart: “I could not resist the love of my mother. The pull she had on my spirit during those reflective early morning breakfasts was too powerful to resist.”

Meals in the Scriptures

Many significant events in the scriptures are centered around meals. To solidify important spiritual teachings, the Savior fed people physically. When teaching His higher law to 5,000 people, He filled them with loaves and fishes (see [Matt. 14:15–21](#)). Before His atoning sacrifice, He called His disciples not to a final meeting but to a last supper. There He taught them to “love one another; as I have loved you” ([John 13:34](#)). After His [Resurrection](#), on the shores of Galilee, He bid His disciples to “come and dine. . . . Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. . . . So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me . . . ?” ([John 21:12–13, 15](#)). It was also at a meal that Jesus gave the earthshaking charge to the Apostles to “go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” ([Mark 16:15](#)).

The Lord knows that food and the circumstances in which we partake of it can help us remember some important things. We remember people we have shared a meal with, and we remember where we have eaten special meals. The children of Israel celebrated feasts to commemorate blessings of the Lord, such as the Passover. Each week we are nurtured by the Lord as we partake of the emblems of His atoning sacrifice, represented by bread and water—two essentials of life. The Savior taught, “For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that

eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him” ([John 6:55–56](#)). Through nurturing emblems we promise to “always remember Him” ([D&C 20:77, 79](#)).

More Than Casseroles and Soup

As a young mother I did not fully understand my power as a nurturer. Though we were a busy family, I considered everyone’s presence at dinnertime nonnegotiable. It was our most consistent gathering time, and everyone planned to eat together before going on to other activities. I learned of the influence of my nurturing when our youngest daughter wrote in a college paper: “Dinner in our home was not just an eating ritual, but a special time for the family to communicate and to share our thoughts and stories of the day. . . . We often sat together for over an hour as we savored the conversation as much as the food.”

I thought I was just cooking casseroles and soup. But I had created the venue, the reason to gather. Because I prepared a meal to share with my family, something special happened. It was a simple process, and our style changed with the ages of our children. When they were young we could discuss a picture from the Gospel Art Picture Kit (item no. 34735) or memorize a scripture. When they were older we asked more questions and shared experiences. Over the years our children grew and matured, and we loved each other.

Mothers, who are “primarily responsible for the nurture of their children,” can be a powerful force for [strengthening families](#) when they use mealtimes to gather loved ones. They follow the example of the Savior to calm, teach, and help their families remember important things as they feed, cultivate, educate, and rear at the consecrated tables in their homes.

- Julie B. Beck “Powerful Nurturing“ Ensign, December 2005