

Boyd K. Packer “The Father and the Family” Ensign, May 1994

A family begins when a young man and woman are drawn to one another by an irresistible force of nature. They offer to one another that which distinguishes him as male and her as female, and they want, above all else, to find the one with whom they can completely express their love. They want to have children—to be a family.

These compelling forces of nature should not be resisted, only approached cautiously, protecting those life-generating powers until promises have been made to one another, covenants with the Lord, and a legal ceremony performed, witnessed, and recorded.

Then, and only then, as husband and wife, man and woman, may they join together in that expression of love through which life is created.

The ultimate purpose of every teaching, every activity in the Church is that parents and their children are happy at home, sealed in an eternal marriage, and linked to their generations.

The ultimate purpose of the adversary, who has “great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time,”¹ is to disrupt, disturb, and destroy the home and the family. Like a ship without a rudder, without a compass, we drift from the family values which have anchored us in the past. Now we are caught in a current so strong that unless we correct our course, civilization as we know it will surely be wrecked to pieces.

Moral values are being neglected and prayer expelled from public schools on the pretext that moral teaching belongs to religion. At the same time, atheism, the secular religion, is admitted to class, and our youngsters are proselyted to a conduct without morality.

World leaders and court judges agree that the family must endure if we are to survive. At the same time, they use the words *freedom* and *choice* as tools to pry apart the safeguards of the past and loosen up the laws on marriage, abortion, and gender. In so doing, they promote the very things which threaten the family.

None of this is new. Jacob, the Book of Mormon prophet, told the people of Nephi:

“I ... am weighed down with much more desire and anxiety for the welfare of your souls than I have hitherto been. ...

“It grieveth me that I must use so much boldness of speech concerning you, before your wives and your children, many of whose feelings are exceedingly tender and chaste and delicate before God.”²

This crisis of the family is no surprise to the Church. We have certainly known what was coming. I know of no better testimony that we are led by prophets than our preparation for this present emergency.

The scriptures speak of prophets as “watch[men] upon the tower” who see “the enemy while he [is] yet afar off”³ and who have “beheld also things which were not visible to the natural eye ... [for] a seer hath the Lord raised up unto his people.”⁴

Thirty-three years ago the Brethren warned us of the disintegration of the family and told us to prepare. It was announced by the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles that the Church would be restructured.

The weekly family home evening was introduced by the First Presidency, who said that “the home [is] the basis of a righteous life and . . . no other instrumentality can take its place nor fulfil its essential functions.”⁵

Parents are provided with excellent materials for teaching their children, with a promise that the faithful will be blessed.⁶

While the doctrines and revealed organization remain unchanged, all agencies of the Church have been reshaped in their relationship to one another and to the home.

So sweeping were those changes that the entire curriculum of the Church was overhauled—based on scriptures, with excellent manuals for each course.

And years were spent preparing new editions of the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. Except for correcting printing errors and adding three revelations to the Doctrine and Covenants, the scriptural text remains unchanged.

Cross-references and other helps were added to make the scriptures more accessible. In the Topical Guide, for instance, under the heading of “Jesus Christ” there are eighteen pages—small print, single-spaced—the most comprehensive compilation of scriptural references on the Lord that has ever been compiled in the history of the world.

The new editions of the scriptures are complete in English and Spanish, and work is now under way in dozens of languages.

We can only imagine where we would be if we were just now reacting to this terrible redefinition of the family. But that is not the case. We are not casting frantically about trying to decide what to do. We know what to do and what to teach.

The family is very much alive and well in the Church. Hundreds of thousands of happy families face life with an unwavering faith in the future.

The course we follow is not of our own making. The plan of salvation, the great plan of happiness, was revealed to us, and the prophets and Apostles continue to receive revelation as the Church and its members stand in need of more.

We, like Jacob, must teach “according to the strict commands of God,” “notwithstanding the greatness of the task.” Like Jacob, we also run the risk of enlarging “the wounds of those who are already wounded, instead of consoling and healing their wounds.”⁷

When we speak plainly of divorce, abuse, gender identity, contraception, abortion, parental neglect, we are thought by some to be way out of touch or to be uncaring. Some ask if we know how many we hurt when we speak plainly. Do we know of marriages in trouble, of the many who remain single, of single-parent families, of couples unable to have children, of parents with wayward children, or of those confused about gender? Do we know? Do we care?

Those who ask have no idea how much we care; you know little of the sleepless nights, of the endless hours of work, of prayer, of study, of travel—all for the happiness and redemption of mankind.

Because we *do* know and because we *do* care, we must teach the rules of happiness without dilution, apology, or avoidance. That is our calling.

I once learned a valuable lesson from a mission Relief Society president. In a conference, she announced some tightening up of procedures. A sister stood up and defiantly said, “Those rules can’t apply to us! You don’t understand us! We are an exception.”

That wonderful Relief Society president replied, “Dear sister, we’d like not to take care of the exception first. We will establish the rule first, and then we’ll see to the exception.” Many times I have borrowed from her wisdom, grateful for what she taught me.

Now, following the example of Jacob, I speak to the men of the Church. Most of you are worthy fathers and husbands who do what you should do. But there are women whose hearts have been broken⁸ and children who are neglected, even abused.

If we are to help them, we must begin with the men. The next series of stake and regional conferences will be devoted to teaching the doctrines and principles of responsible and worthy manhood.

Some of you had no worthy example to follow and now visit the abuse or neglect of your own parents upon your wife and children.

Brethren, do you understand that we emphasize the teaching of the scriptures because they are the constant? From them we learn the purposes of life, the gifts of the Spirit. From them we learn about personal revelation, how to discern good from evil, truth from error. The scriptures provide the pattern and the basis for correct doctrine.

From doctrine, we learn principles of conduct, how to respond to problems of everyday living, even to failures, for they, too, are provided for in the doctrines.

If you understand the great plan of happiness and follow it, what goes on in the world will not determine your happiness. You will be tried, for that is part of the plan, but “thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; and then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high.”⁹

Your responsibility as a father and a husband transcends any other interest in life. It is unthinkable that a Latter-day Saint man would cheat on his wife or abandon the children he has fathered, or neglect or abuse them.

The Lord has “commanded you to bring up your children in light and truth.”¹⁰

You are responsible, unless disabled, to provide temporal support for your wife and children.¹¹ You are to devote, even sacrifice yourself to the bringing up of your children in light and truth.¹²

That requires perfect moral fidelity to your wife, with no reason ever for her to doubt your faithfulness.

Never should there be a domineering or unworthy behavior in the tender, intimate relationship between husband and wife.¹³

Your wife is your partner in the leadership of the family and should have full knowledge of and full participation in all decisions relating to your home.

Lead your family to the Church, to the covenants and ordinances. We are trying to reduce the length and number of meetings and activities outside of the home.

I cannot express the depth of my devotion to my wife and children, their companions, and their children. I have learned more by far from them than they from me. That learning comes in ordinary experiences, the joy and the pain of everyday life.

I learned from a little boy the identity and value of a human soul. Some years ago, two of our little boys were wrestling on the rug. They had reached that pitch where laughter turns to tears. I worked a foot gently between them and lifted the older boy (then just four) to a sitting position on the rug, saying, “Hey, there, you monkeys, you’d better settle down.”

He folded his little arms and looked at me with surprising seriousness. His little boy feelings had been hurt, and he protested, “I not a monkey, Daddy, I a person.”

I was overwhelmed with love for him. I realized he was a child of God. How much I wanted him to be “a person”—one of eternal worth. From such ordinary experiences, I have learned to understand doctrine. “Children,” truly, “are an heritage of the Lord.”¹⁴

The family is safe within the Church. We are not in doubt as to the course we must follow. It was given in the beginning, and guidance from on high is renewed as need may be.

As we continue on our course, these things will follow as night the day:

The distance between the Church and a world set on a course which we cannot follow will steadily increase.

Some will fall away into apostasy, break their covenants, and replace the plan of redemption with their own rules.

Across the world, those who now come by the tens of thousands will inevitably come as a flood to where the family is safe. Here they will worship the Father in the name of Christ, by the gift of the Holy Ghost, and know that the gospel is the great plan of happiness, of redemption, of which I bear witness in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.