

Teaching the Doctrine of the Family

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This generation will be called upon to defend the doctrine of the family as never before. If they don't know the doctrine, they can't defend it.

As I meet with young single adults around the world, I ask them, "Why does the First Presidency care so much about you and provide so many resources for you?" These are some of the answers I get: "We are future Church leaders." "We need training so we can stay strong." "Our testimonies are strengthened in our seminary and institute classes." "We need to meet other great Latter-day Saint youth." "We are the hope of the future." I have rarely heard, "So I will someday be a better father or a better mother." Their responses are generally about self, because this is the time of life they are in.

Nevertheless, parents, teachers, and leaders of youth need to teach the rising generation the doctrine of the [family](#). It is essential to help them achieve eternal life (see [Moses 1:39](#)). They need to know that the theology of the family is based on the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement. They need to understand the threats to the family so they will know what they are fighting against and can prepare. They need to understand clearly that the fulness of the gospel is realized in temple ordinances and covenants.

The Theology of the Family

In The Church of [Jesus Christ](#) of Latter-day Saints, we have a theology of the family that is based on the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement. The Creation of the earth provided a place where families could live. God created a man and a woman who were the two essential halves of a family. It was part of Heavenly Father's plan that Adam and Eve be sealed and form an eternal family.

The Fall provided a way for the family to grow. Adam and Eve were family leaders who chose to have a mortal experience. The Fall made it possible for them to have sons and daughters.

The Atonement allows for the family to be sealed together eternally. It allows for families to have eternal growth and perfection. The plan of happiness, also called the plan of salvation, was a plan created for families. The rising generation need to understand that the main pillars of our theology are centered in the family.

When we speak of qualifying for the blessings of eternal life, we mean qualifying for the blessings of eternal families. This was Christ's doctrine, and it was restored through the Prophet [Joseph Smith](#). It is recorded in [Doctrine and Covenants 2:1–3](#):

“Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

“And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers.

“If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming.”

This scripture is talking about temple blessings—ordinances and covenants without which “the whole earth [is] utterly wasted.”

“The Family: A Proclamation to the World” was written to reinforce that the family is central to the Creator’s plan.¹ Without the family, there is no plan; there is no reason for mortal life.

Threats to the Family

In addition to understanding the theology of the family, we all need to understand the threats to the family. If we don’t, we can’t prepare for the battle. Evidence is all around us that the family is becoming less important. Marriage rates are declining, the age of marriage is rising, and divorce rates are rising. Out-of-wedlock births are growing. [Abortion](#) is rising and becoming increasingly legal. We see lower birth rates. We see unequal relationships between men and women, and we see cultures that still practice abuse within family relationships. Many times a career gains importance over the family.

Many of our youth are losing confidence in the institution of families. They’re placing more and more value on education and less and less importance on forming an eternal family. Many don’t see forming families as a faith-based work. For them, it’s a selection process much like shopping. Many also distrust their own moral strength and the moral strength of their peers. Because temptations are so fierce, many are not sure they can be successful in keeping covenants.

Many youth also have insufficient and underdeveloped social skills, which are an impediment to forming eternal families. They are increasingly adept at talking to someone 50 miles (80 km) away and less able to carry on conversations with people in the same room. That makes it difficult for them to socialize with each other.

We also face the problem that we read about in [Ephesians 6:12](#): “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” Public policies are being made every day that are antifamily, and the definition of family is changing legally around the world. [Pornography](#) is rampant. For those who create pornography, their new target audience is young women. Parents are being portrayed as inept and out of touch. Antifamily media messages are everywhere. Youth are being desensitized about the need to form eternal families.

We see how this can happen when we read the words of Korihor, an anti-Christ: “Thus he did preach unto them, leading away the hearts of many, causing them to lift up their heads in their

wickedness, yea, leading away many women, and also men, to commit whoredoms” ([Alma 30:18](#)). Satan knows that he will never have a body; he will never have a family. So he targets young women, who will create the bodies for the future generations.

Korihor was an anti-Christ. Anti-Christ is antifamily. Any doctrine or principle our youth hear from the world that is antifamily is also anti-Christ. It’s that clear. If our youth cease to believe in the righteous traditions of their fathers as did the people described in [Mosiah 26](#), if our youth don’t understand their part in the plan, they could be led away.

Teaching the Rising Generation

What is it we hope this rising generation will understand and do because of what we teach them? The answers to that question as well as the key elements of the doctrine of the family are found in the family proclamation. President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) said that the proclamation was “a declaration and reaffirmation of standards, doctrines, and practices” that this Church has always had.²

President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) said, “This order ... of family government where a man and woman enter into a covenant with God—just as did Adam and Eve—to be sealed for eternity, to have posterity ... is the only means by which we can one day see the face of God and live.”³

The rising generation need to understand that the command to “multiply, and replenish the earth” ([Genesis 1:28](#); [Moses 2:28](#)) remains in force. Bearing children is a faith-based work. President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) said, “It is an act of extreme selfishness for a married couple to refuse to have children when they are able to do so.”⁴ Motherhood and fatherhood are eternal roles. Each carries the responsibility for either the male or the female half of the plan. Youth is the time to prepare for those eternal roles and responsibilities.

Parents, teachers, and leaders can help young people prepare for the blessings of Abraham. What are those blessings? Abraham tells us in [Abraham 1:2](#). He says he wanted “the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer; ... to be one who possessed great knowledge, ... to be a father of many nations, a prince of peace, and desiring to receive instructions, and to keep the commandments of God, I became a rightful heir, a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers.”

Where are these blessings Abraham received? They come only to those who have a temple sealing and marriage. A man cannot become a “father of many nations” without being sealed to his wife. Likewise, Abraham could not hold the right belonging to the fathers without a wife who had the right belonging to the mothers.

The stories of Abraham and Sarah and of Isaac and Rebekah are found in Genesis. Abraham and Sarah had only one son, Isaac. If Abraham was to be the “father of many nations,” how important was Isaac’s wife, Rebekah? She was so important that he sent his servant hundreds of miles to find the right young woman—one who would keep her covenants, one who understood what it meant to form an eternal family.

In [Genesis 24:60](#), Rebekah is blessed to be “the mother of thousands of millions.” Where do we find those kinds of blessings? They are received in the temple.

The story of Isaac and Rebekah is an example of the man, who has the keys, and the woman, who has the influence, working together to ensure the fulfillment of their blessings. Their story is pivotal. The blessings of the house of Israel depended on a man and a woman who understood their place in the plan and their responsibilities to form an eternal family, to bear children, and to teach them.

In our day we have the responsibility to send “Isaac” and “Rebekah” forth from our homes and classrooms. Every young man and young woman should understand his or her role in this great partnership—that they are each an “Isaac” or a “Rebekah.” Then they will know with clarity what they have to do.

Live the Hope of Eternal Life

Parents, teachers, and leaders: live in your homes, in your families, in your marriages so that youth will develop hope for eternal life from watching you. Live and teach with so much clarity that what you teach will cut through all the noise youth are hearing and so that it will pierce their hearts and touch them.

Live in your home so that you’re brilliant in the basics, so that you’re intentional about your roles and responsibilities in the family. Think in terms of precision not perfection. If you have your goals and you are precise in how you go about them in your homes, youth will learn from you. They will learn that you pray, study the scriptures together, have family home evening, make a priority of mealtimes, and speak respectfully of your marriage partner. Then from your example the rising generation will gain great hope.

This I Know

We are preparing our youth for the temple and for eternal families. Many threats are coming to them that can discourage them from forming an eternal family. Our role in this is to teach them so they don’t misunderstand. We must be very clear on key points of doctrine, which we find in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.”

This generation will be called upon to defend the doctrine of the family as never before. If they don’t know it, they can’t defend it. They need to understand temples and priesthood.

President Kimball said:

“Many of the social restraints which in the past have helped to reinforce and to shore up the family are dissolving and disappearing. The time will come when only those who believe deeply and actively in the family will be able to preserve their families in the midst of the gathering evil around us. ...

“... There are those who would define the family in such a nontraditional way that they would define it out of existence. ...

“We of all people, brothers and sisters, should not be taken in by the specious arguments that the family unit is somehow tied to a particular phase of development a moral society is going through. We are free to resist those moves which downplay the significance of the family and which play up the significance of selfish individualism. We know the family to be eternal.”⁵

The gospel of Jesus Christ is true. It was restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith. We have the fulness of the gospel this day. We are sons and daughters of heavenly parents, who sent us forth to have this earthly experience to prepare us for the blessing of eternal families. I bear you my testimony of our Savior, Jesus Christ, that through His Atonement we can become perfect and equal to our responsibilities in our earthly families and that through His Atonement we have the promise of eternal life in families.